

GEOFFREY RUSSOM

The Evolution of Verse Structure in Old and Middle English Poetry

*From the Earliest Alliterative Poems
to Iambic Pentameter*



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THE EVOLUTION OF VERSE STRUCTURE IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

In this fascinating study, Geoffrey Russom traces the evolution of the major English poetic traditions by reference to the evolution of the English language, and considers how verse forms are born, how they evolve, and why they die. Using a general theory of poetic form employing universal principles rooted in the human language faculty, Russom argues that certain kinds of poetry tend to arise spontaneously in languages with identifiable characteristics. Language changes may require modification of metrical rules and may eventually lead to extinction of a meter. Russom's theory is applied to explain the development of English meters from the earliest alliterative poems in Old and Middle English and the transition to iambic meter in the Modern English period. This thorough yet accessible study provides detailed analyses of form in key poems, including *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and a glossary of technical terms.

GEOFFREY RUSSOM is Emeritus Professor of English and Medieval Studies at Brown University and Nicholas Brown Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres, Emeritus. He is the author of *Old English Meter and Linguistic Theory* (Cambridge, 1987) and of *Beowulf and Old Germanic Metre* (Cambridge, 1998), and has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on the theory of poetic form, the history of the English language, and the artistic excellence of preliterate verse.

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From the Earliest Alliterative Poems to Iambic Pentameter

GEOFFREY RUSSOM

Brown University



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For Mike and Sue

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"A Kodiak Poem" is reprinted from *Effort at Speech: New and Selected Poems* by William Meredith, published by TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press in 1997. Copyright © 1997 by William Meredith. All rights reserved; used by permission of Northwestern University Press and Richard Harteis.

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General Principles of Poetic Form

1.1 Metrics, Linguistics, and Literary Creation

A widely used history of English discusses the structure of the modern language before tracing its descent from its oldest ancestor, Proto-Indo-European.¹ This design introduces essential linguistic concepts with familiar examples. Comparison of English with languages like Sanskrit, Armenian, and Gaelic then highlights shared features discovered by historical linguists. Comparison with languages like Chinese and Hebrew distinguishes features due to common Indo-European origin from features also present in unrelated languages. I have adopted a similar design in this book, which introduces metrical concepts with Modern English examples, compares English poetry with poetry in other languages, then traces the evolution of English meters from prehistory to the Modern English period.

Work on linguistic *universals*, which began in earnest during the 1960s, has made it easier to analyze a newly discovered language or an ancient language preserved in written form.² Since the foundational work of Chomsky, researchers have been testing proposed universals against a representative sample of the world's languages.³ We are now better equipped to identify what is English about English and what is simply human.

I hope to persuade linguists that a *universalist* theory of meter makes a useful addition to established linguistic sub-fields. Historical linguists, of course, have always relied on metrical rules for analysis of languages with no living speakers. An 1885 study of Old English meter provided an indispensable foundation for research on the evolution of English.⁴ Use of metrical evidence has been rudimentary for the most part, however, drawing on obvious requirements of a particular verse form. Linguistics can profit from a genuine *theory* of poetic form, one that considers not only the practical consequences of metrical rules but also their relation to rules of ordinary language, the architecture of systems into which metrical rules

are organized, the evolution of metrical rule systems in tandem with linguistic systems, and the relation of a given system to other systems that arise in other languages.

I hope to persuade literary scholars that a universalist approach to a challenging meter, whether ancient or contemporary, can advance our understanding of its fundamental principles. I have also written with experimental poets in mind because they are often quite well informed about linguistics and share my interest in determining what counts as poetic independently of the rules for any particular tradition.

For study of metrical evolution, English is an obvious place to start. It is the most thoroughly studied language on the planet. The most thoroughly studied group of related languages is the Indo-European group to which English belongs. Alliterative meter, the kind of meter employed in *Beowulf*, can be traced from its birth in the first millennium BC to its death about two thousand years later. The traditional form that replaced it, iambic pentameter, held a unique position at the highest levels of poetic craft from Chaucer to the Romantics.

To my knowledge, nothing like this project has been attempted before. There is an important PhD thesis on metrical change from Old to Middle English poetry, but it does not propose a [universalist](#) theory of poetic form.⁵ As will soon become apparent, I have profited from research on poetic [universals](#) by theoretical linguists.⁶ These researchers are not primarily concerned with English alliterative meters or with evolution of metrical systems, however. The number of academic fields involved precludes exhaustive coverage in every field, which would make this book far too long. For information about previous research I have emphasized publications with significant scope that offer good introductions to their topics and useful [bibliography](#). My purpose is to show that a universalist theory squares with reputable scholarship in the pertinent fields, not to intervene in all of them. Relevant technical arguments from my own publications are usually summarized rather than repeated.

1.2 [Sound Echoes](#) in “A Kodiak Poem” (William Meredith)

Some experimental poetry in English employs sound echoes that are non-traditional but also quite accessible. Consider item (1), for example.⁷

- (1) Precipitous is the shape and stance of the spruce
 Pressed against the mountains in gestures of height,
 Pleasing to Poussin the white, repetitious peaks.

Fonder mountains surely curl around your homeland,
 Fondle the home farms with a warmer green;
 Follow these hills for cold only, or for fool's gold.

Easy winds sweep lengthwise along the known places,
 Essay brittle windows and are turned away;
 Eskimo houses had seal-gut windows that the east wind drummed.

A fish people now, once fur hunters and fierce,
 Fire-needing, they buried their dead with faggots,
 And when a man went to their hell, he froze.

Remembering the lands before but much more real,
 Look where, aloft, you cannot say how except rarely,
 The raven, rich in allusion, rides alone.

In representing his arctic landscape, Meredith links its breathtaking geometric regularity to its terrifying weather. He appreciates the heroic achievement of its inhabitants while expressing a preference for warmer, less austere symmetrical climes. Meredith presents his argument in an appropriate form that departs from traditional regularity. The most familiar **sound echo** in English poetry since the Renaissance is **rhyme**, which matches sounds at the end of the line-final word. Meredith begins with a mirror image of this convention, matching sounds at the beginning of the line-initial word. The match often involves more than one sound and could obviously not be due to chance. It is a kind of **alliteration** but differs from alliteration as used in *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The first two lines of Meredith's poem match the consonants [p], [r], and [s] in the line-initial words. The third line also matches initial [p], the letter < e >, and the letter < s >, which has its voiced pronunciation as [z] in this instance.⁸ In the second stanza we find matching of the first four **phonemes** in *fonder* and *fondle*, derivatives of the same linguistic **root** that are related in meaning. In the third line, *follow* misses out [n] and [d] but matches [l] in the second syllable of *fondle*. The third stanza matches all the letters in *easy* and *essay* but the sounds of these letters do not match at all, as the **phonetic** transcriptions [izi] and [ese] make clear. In a literate tradition, matching can involve letters as well as sounds. In the second and third lines, there is alphabetical and phonetic matching of [es] in *essay* and *Eskimo*. Meredith breaks the pattern in the fourth stanza, where the initial letters and sounds are different in every line. To find the alliteration between *fish* and line-initial *fire*, we need to go one syllable inside the first line. In the third line, the only f-alliteration is at the end, on *froze*. Once nudged to the right, we notice that the most regular alliteration now occurs in line-final words, with *fierce* and

faggots matching *froze*. The rightward shift has been anticipated by sporadic non-initial matching in previous stanzas: *Poussin* and *peaks* in stanza one, *farms* and *fool's* in stanza two, *easy* and *east* in stanza three. The echo in stanza three is highlighted within the phrase *east wind*, an unmistakable two-word echo of *easy winds*. The final stanza interweaves distinct patterns of alliteration. In its first two lines, alliteration on *real* and *rarely* continues the line-final patterning of the fourth stanza. In the last line, the r-alliteration shifts to the middle of the line with *raven*, *rich*, and *rides*. A second system of alliteration on [l] links *lands*, *aloft*, and *allusion*, then finishes in line-final position with *alone*. Meredith has not replaced line-final rhyme with any other fixed scheme. The metrical variety of his poem implements a preference for asymmetry expressed on the literal level.

Alliteration has not entirely replaced rhyme-like matching at the end of the word. It is hard to overlook the *cold/gold* rhyme in stanza two. A linguist would add that the initial [k] and [g] sounds of these words are velar stops that differ only in voicing. Several of the rhyme-like echoes would not be found in canonical English poetry, for example *surely/curl*, *farms/warmer*, and *fur/fire*. The matching is scrambled in *precipitous/repetitious*, but the sheer number of sounds involved makes it effective.

Although Meredith's sound echoes are non-traditional in English, many of them are regulated in other traditions. Every line of skaldic court poetry employs one rhyme comparable to *surely/curl* (called *aðalhending*) and one rhyme comparable to *farms/warmer* (called *skothending*).⁹ Matching pairs like *precipitous/repetitious* are well established in rap lyrics that disseminate verse forms of the global twenty-first century. Poets can be sure that a *sound echo* is effective if echoes of the same kind turn up in popular songs.

Links Between Form and Content

The author has integrated formal experiment with thematic material. The protean variability of the form implements Meredith's challenge to Poussin, a painter known for the mathematical regularity of his landscapes. Sympathy for heroic culture expressed on the literal level is underscored by choice of *alliteration* as the predominant sound echo. Readers of English poetry are sure to associate this sound echo with *Beowulf*. The raven "rich in allusion" alludes, among other things, to the carrion-eater of Old English poetry, whose enthusiasm for warfare as a source of nourishment stands in ironic contrast to the grim outlook for human beings.¹⁰ Gathering of the wolf, eagle, and raven before a battle provides a vivid foretaste of doom in this pessimistic tradition.

*Specified Location, Proximity, Frequency, and Theme
in Metrical Domains*

Moving now toward **universalist** poetics, we step back from one particular work and inquire what *kinds* of craftsmanship communicate poetic form. *Specified location* plays an important role. If the odds against accidental alliteration at the beginning of adjacent lines are, say, 25 to 1 on average, the odds against a third match in the following line will be 25 squared (625) to 1. A linguistic event with such low probability will be noticed. The likelihood of chance occurrence decreases even more sharply for repetition of two adjacent sounds in a specified location, as with *fondle* and *follow*. *Proximity* functions like predictable location. There is no *r*-alliteration in the initial or final words of Meredith's last line, but the three *r*-words clustered in the middle, however unexpected, are sure to attract attention. *Frequency* adds to the salience of matching in predictable locations or close proximity, with each continuation of the same match lowering the probability of chance occurrence. A *poetic domain* can showcase matching words placed within it. Line-initial alliteration has added salience when it fills a stanza entirely, as in the first three stanzas of Meredith's poem. Specified location, proximity, frequency, and domain are intimately related aspects of poetic form and a change in one can augment or diminish the effect of another.

Meredith's stanzas are marked as coherent domains by some purely visual cues of literary convention. The spaces between stanzas have no stable equivalent in oral performance. Binding of clauses by semicolons within a stanza is a literate convention related quite indirectly to the **acoustic signal**. These stanzas can be identified at the speed of recitation, however. In addition to being marked by alliterative techniques, each one is a conceptual unit with an identifiable theme: the altitude and whiteness of arctic mountains in stanza one; contrast with smaller, green hills in the warm climes of stanza two; wind in stanza three; basic survival technologies in stanza four; and mortality in stanza five.

1.3 Themes and Binding Domains in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18

Comparison of Meredith's poem with earlier work will help us abstract away from a particular era of literary history. Consider item (2), Shakespeare's well-known sonnet 18.¹¹

- (2) Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed.
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Item (2) consists of three stanzas with four lines each, called *quatrains*, followed by a two-line domain called a *couplet*. In the edition cited here, sonnets are printed without extra spaces between these domains. The first quatrain presents the topic and the second one develops it. In the third quatrain there is a conspicuous turn of thought, marked overtly by *but*. Finally, in the couplet, the poet makes a concluding statement and we see where the argument has been tending: a poet's praise confers a kind of immortality on the person celebrated. Shakespeare's poetry draws on the culture of the European Renaissance, in which sonnets typically celebrate an object of personal affection; but the *Beowulf* poet makes similar claims for the power of heroic epic, which bestows undying glory on praiseworthy heroes (sections 2.2–4). At a still higher level of generality, both poets weave statements about art into topics that are not inherently artistic. In this case as in others, comparative study can guard against bias by working respectfully through cultural detail toward the level of generality at which a valid universal appears.¹²

A regular patterning of sound echoes called a *rhyme scheme* helps unify the domains of sonnet 18. Each quatrain has a distinct set of alternating rhymes and the couplet has a distinct rhyming pair. *Sound echoes* perform an integrative or *binding* function in these units. In Meredith's poem, consistent leftward sound echoes in the first three stanzas create line groupings that are novel and also well integrated. Use of a specified binding pattern in the opening stanzas establishes the three-line unit well enough to allow for more variety in the final two stanzas, which are also integrated by alliteration but in different ways.

1.4 Linguistic Features of Effective Sound Echoes

Stressed syllables provide effective sound echoes because they are rather distinctly pronounced and allow for a wide variety of vowels. In American English, the vowel of an unstressed syllable is typically reduced to schwa,

spelled phonetically as [ə]. This is the second vowel in *houses*, *bounded*, and *sofa* as I pronounce them. Schwa employs minimal effort of articulation and has a high probability of chance occurrence. It contributes very little to a sound echo. In native English words, stress falls on the **root** syllable, which encodes the distinctive meaning of a word. Prefixes and suffixes, which encode routine grammatical information, typically lack stress. Like prefixes and suffixes, high-frequency **function words** encode grammatical information and are normally unstressed. English function words include pronouns like *they*, prepositions like *from*, **determiners** like *the*, auxiliary verbs like *could*, and forms of the verb *to be*. Function words form **closed classes** with just a few members, unlike **lexical nouns and adjectives**, which form **open classes** with an unlimited number of members.

Given the structure of English, a **sound echo** involving stressed syllables will usually have semantic as well as phonological prominence. Ideally, semantic relations marked by the echo will take on special meaning within a particular work. Shakespeare's **rhymes** highlight semantic kinships in *day/May* (times associated with youth), *shines/declines* (high point and descent), *dimmed/untrimmed* (loss of beauty), and *fade/shade* (loss of color). At a more abstract level, these rhymes align life and death with light and darkness. Alliteration has comparable semantic importance in Meredith's poem. In the fourth stanza, for example, the unifying sound echoes occur in *fish*, *fur*, *fierce*, *fire*, *faggots*, and *froze*. These echo-words represent the theme of survival as a progression through struggles with the environment to the final victory of the cold, introducing the theme of mortality in the final stanza. As with the grammatical constructions of ordinary language, **sound echoes** bring words into meaningful relations.¹³ Sound echoes furnish the poet with a secondary grammar that operates across sentence boundaries to promote extended meditation on important themes.

1.5 Flexible Stanza Structure in Early Irish Tradition

In Irish syllabic verse, the four-line stanza provides a domain for many poetic meters. Item (3) comes from a ninth-century poem describing the fairy otherworld, a kind of paradise inhabited by humanoids not descended from Adam and Eve.¹⁴

- (3) *Srotha téithmilsí tar tír,*
 (There are) streams gentle-sweet across the land,
rogu de mid ocus fín,
 choice of mead and wine,

doíni delgnaidi cen on
 people fine without flaw,
combart cen peccad, cen chol.
 sex without sin, without guilt.

The only hard-and-fast rule in this tradition mandates composition in four-line stanzas that have some specified metrical pattern.¹⁵ To create such a pattern, the poet selects a number of syllables for each line, determines the stress pattern of its final word, and selects the rhyme scheme, which may employ an aabb arrangement of two couplets, as in the example above, or the alternating abab arrangement employed in Shakespeare's quatrains. Stress is governed only in the line-final word. In item (3), each line has seven syllables and ends with a monosyllabic stressed word.

Even if the listener has never encountered it before, an Irish stanza form will emerge clearly with repetition. The Irish system works well enough to permit occasional departures from the pattern toward the end of a poem. Alliteration on stressed words can occur anywhere in the stanza but must be enhanced by proximity. Words do not alliterate correctly if a stressed word without alliteration stands between them. In item (3), *doíni delgnaidi* illustrates the simplest kind of alliteration, with nothing between the alliterating words. The words *téithmílsi* and *tír* alliterate correctly and the intervening preposition *tar* is unstressed. Although its [t] matches the initial consonants of the words on either side, *tar* would not be considered to alliterate. Bardic poets knew that unstressed syllables make weak [sound echoes](#).

1.6 Approximate Matching of Sounds

In canonical English poetry from Shakespeare to Pope, all consonants in the matching domain of a rhyme must match exactly. As item (3) shows, Irish rhyme allows for approximate matching of consonants. The couplets in item (3) have inexact matches of word-final consonants: *r/n* and *n/l*. Though distinct, the matched consonants are similar. A linguist would recognize *r*, *n*, and *l* as *sonorants* (or *sonants*), along with *y*, *w*, and *m*. Another term for sonorants is *semivowels*. In Proto-Indo-European, sonorants often provided the only vowel in a syllable.¹⁶ In American broadcast English, the final syllables in *gutter*, *fiddle*, *bottom*, and *ridden* are typically pronounced as syllabic *r*, *l*, *m*, and *n*. Approximate rhymes occur frequently in popular songs, as for example when a male lover sits at *home* all *alone* wondering to himself if his old flame is with someone *else*. In the approximate matching *home/*

alone, the final consonants are voiced nasals; in the *self/else* matching, the final consonants are voiceless fricatives. Modern poets make frequent use of approximate rhyme. Some of them have well-known Celtic interests (Robert Graves, Louis MacNeice, and Dylan Thomas, for example).

Like bardic rhyme, bardic **alliteration** makes extensive use of approximate matching. The initial consonant of an Irish word is altered when that word occurs after certain other words in a sentence. Word-initial *p*, for example, can be voiced to [b] and word-initial *b* can be nasalized to [m]. The altered consonants remain similar to the unaltered ones because only one feature changes and other features remain as they were. Initial [p] and [b] are both bilabial stops. Initial [b] and [m] are both voiced bilabials. Such **sandhi** alterations are completely ignored in bardic poetry and the word always alliterates according to its **underlying form** (roughly, the citation form as it might be pronounced from an alphabetical word list). **Phonetic** [m] from underlying *b* alliterates with unaltered **phonetic** [b], but **phonetic** [m] from underlying *b* does not alliterate with **phonetic** [m] from underlying *m*. Metrical practices of this kind make it clear that poetry is not simply “for the ear” but for the human ear and its affiliated linguistic capacities. Irish alliterative patterns do not exist “out there” in the sense that they could be heard by non-human animals or show up clearly on an oscilloscope. During oral performance, Irish alliterative patterns can be apprehended only by a listener who knows Irish. Bardic tradition is prehistoric, extending farther back in time than the sound changes that altered initial consonants. Before these changes occurred, alliteration was restricted to sounds that were phonetically more alike.¹⁷ Poets of the historical period knew that they were matching different sounds, however, and valued that difference as a source of metrical variety. One early Irish metrical treatise describes a fault called the “bridge of alliteration,” which occurs when phonetic matching is not varied at regular intervals by the effects of **sandhi** rules.¹⁸

1.7 The Syllabic Onset, **Rhyme**, Nucleus, and Coda

Old Irish and Old English poetic traditions are distinct, but in both of them a stressed syllable with no initial consonant **alliterates** with any other such syllable. By this rule, modern English words like *arm*, *elbow*, *iron*, *oar*, and *ooze* all alliterate perfectly with one another. The rule clearly does not require matching of the first sound in alliterating words. What must match is the first element of a linguistic constituent called the **onset**, which

contains any consonants before the vowel of a syllable. When there is no consonant before the vowel, the empty onset counts as a *zero consonant* that matches any other zero consonant. If we represent the zero consonant visually as < ! > in *!arm*, *!elbow*, *!iron*, *!oar*, and *!ooze*, their alliterative behavior loses its exceptional appearance. The onset is followed by the *nucleus*, which contains the vowel, and the *coda*, which contains any consonants after the vowel. In the monosyllabic word *brick*, [br] stands in the onset, [I] stands in the nucleus, and [k] stands in the coda.

If we designed an alliterative rule for a computer, the ideal rule would be one requiring identity of the first letter in alliterating words. For a human listener, who apprehends linguistic constituents, the machine's rule would seem unnatural, with onset matching required in some cases and nuclear matching in others. The ancient Germanic rule of reduplication shows just how unnatural the machine's rule might have seemed when the meter of *Beowulf* was born. This grammatical rule adds a monosyllabic prefix with a specified vowel to past-tense forms of certain verbs. The past-tense prefix is called a *reduplication* because its onset duplicates the first element in the onset of the verbal *root*. In most cases, only the first consonant needs to be matched. Thus *slēpan* 'to sleep' has a reduplicating past tense *sai-slēp*, where the prefix *sai-* matches the [s] of the root onset but not the following [l]. Reduplicative matching bears an unmistakable resemblance to alliterative matching.¹⁹ In *Beowulf*, *slēp* 'sleep' *alliterates* with words like *sāwol* 'soul' (line 1742).

If the verbal root begins with a vowel, the reduplicating prefix has a zero element in its onset, as with *alliteration*. Thus *aukan* 'eke out, increase' reduplicates as *ai-auk* (*!ai-!auk*). In three special cases, reduplication requires matching of the second consonant as well as the first. When the verbal root begins with *sp-*, *st-*, or *sk-*, the consonant following [s] must also be matched. Thus *skáidan* 'divide' reduplicates as *skai-skáip*. Matching of Germanic *sp-*, *st-*, and *sk-* is also required for alliteration. A contemporary poet following the old rules would use pairs like *spill/speak*, *still/stone*, and *skill/score* while avoiding pairs like *spill/sea* and *spill/stone*. Traditional expressions like *still as a stone* still adhere to the old rules. In the history of English, *sp-*, *st-*, and *sk-* sometimes trigger sound changes as if they were single consonants.²⁰ When added to the linguistic evidence of reduplication, the evidence of alliteration helps explain why these sound changes operated as they did. Rules for alliteration show once more that poetic matching does not depend on the *acoustic signal* in any simple way. It may be misleading, in fact, to speak of English syllables that begin with a vowel. For native speakers, syllables begin with an onset.

An alliterative rule requiring identity of the first sound in a word would be doubly unnatural if, as most linguists assume, the nucleus is more closely bound to the coda than to the onset.²¹ This aspect of syllable structure is captured by placing the nucleus and coda together in a higher-level constituent called the *rhyme* (or *rime*), with the onset standing outside the rhyme. Syllable structure can be represented visually in a tree diagram or in an equivalent labeled bracketing, illustrated in item (4) for the word *brick*.

(4) [[br]_{onset} [[I]_{nucleus} [k]_{coda}]_{rhyme}]_{syllable}

Each pair of brackets represents a constituent, with the name of the constituent adjacent to the rightmost bracket. The pair of brackets labeled “*rhyme*” encloses the constituents labeled “*nucleus*” and “*coda*.” The pair of brackets labeled “*syllable*” encloses the constituents labeled “*onset*” and “*rhyme*.” The labeled bracketing is interpreted to mean (1) that the nucleus and coda are constituents of the rhyme; (2) that the onset stands outside the rhyme; and (3) that the onset and the rhyme are the major sub-constituents of the syllable. The boundary between the major sub-constituents of a larger constituent is the *major constituent break*. Within the syllable, the boundary between onset and rhyme is the *major syllabic break*.

1.8 Light and Heavy Syllables

Syllable weight provides evidence for the structure represented in (4). A modern English syllable is *heavy* if it has a *tense vowel* in the nucleus. The tense vowels of American broadcast English are those in *bait*, *beet*, *boat*, *boot*, *bite*, *bout*, and *boil*, notated as [e], [i], [o], [u], [ai], [au], and [oi]. The last three vowels, called *diphthongs*, involve a smooth, rapid movement from one vowel position to another, roughly from the first vowel in the phonetic spelling to the second one. A syllable is *light* if it has a lax vowel in the nucleus and no consonant in the coda. The schwa vowel in the second syllable of *sofa* [sófə] requires minimal linguistic effort and will obviously be classified as *lax*. The other distinctively lax vowels of American broadcast English are those in the stressed syllables of *néver*, *líver*, *sóft*, and *púshing*, notated [ɛ], [ɪ], [ɔ], and [ʊ]. The lax quality of these four vowels stands out because they are paired with near phonetic neighbors that differ from them primarily in being *tense*: [e], [i], [o], and [u], the vowels in the first syllables of *sáver*, *féver*, *óver*, and *swóoping*. The initial vowels in *fáther* and *ládder*, notated [ɑ] and [æ], do not have their own phonetic neighbors and may be tense or lax, depending on the phonological context.

Within English words, a single consonant between vowels normally occupies the onset of the following syllable, and the preceding syllable then has an empty coda. That is the situation in *ne.ver* and *li.ver*, where the boundary between syllables is notated by a point. The initial syllables in these words are light because they have a lax vowel and an empty coda. A syllable is *heavy by position* if it has a lax vowel in the nucleus and one or more consonants in the coda.

When two consonants stand between vowels in an English word, the first usually occupies the coda of the preceding syllable while the second occupies the onset of the following syllable. That is the situation in *af.ter* and *lof.ty*. The initial syllables of these words are heavy by position. Syllable weight is strongly associated with stress. In English, all stressed monosyllables are heavy, with a **tense vowel** in the nucleus (as in *woe*) or at least one consonant in the coda (as in *wet*). When a monosyllabic unstressed word ending in a lax vowel acquires stress, the vowel is tensed. In expressions like “not *the* Robert Redford,” the schwa vowel of unstressed *the* is tensed to [i]. Onset consonants have no effect on syllable weight and the representation in item (4) registers that fact. The domain of English syllable weight is the **rhyme**. This linguistic domain plays an important role, of course, in the poetic echo after which it was named. Stressed monosyllables qualify as canonical rhymes if their linguistic rhymes match.

1.9 Internalized Rules

Children minimize use of rote memory in language learning and maximize use of rules that generate word forms on the fly. A small child who has used *went* appropriately may replace it with *goed* after discovering the rule for formation of regular past tenses. The child learns such rules by intuition and rules proposed by linguists attempt to represent this kind of intuitive knowledge. In technical idiom, linguistic rules, properly formulated, are *psychologically real*.²² Since they are busy discovering rules, young language learners do not seek ad hoc advice about particular cases. If you try to correct their speech, they may ignore you or repeat what they said just as they originally said it – with irritation.²³ Adults fine-tune the rules but continue to avoid rote memory, even for some forms classified as irregular in traditional grammars.²⁴

The child’s innate linguistic ability may seem surprisingly strong but that ability clearly exists. In linguistics, asking “How could that be possible?” often turns out to be a question about the brain that neuroscientists are not ready to answer.²⁵ We don’t know how we are able to speak (in the

sense of knowing exactly how the brain processes language) but our manifest linguistic ability can be studied in a rigorous way. Even in mature theoretical disciplines like physics, the phenomena we study can be mysterious. Newton taught us how to do the math for gravitation but we still do not know how it is possible for a force to work at a distance.²⁶ Poetic form is impossible to explain without the assumption that our ability to apprehend it, like our ability to apprehend linguistic form, operates with amazing precision at amazing speed – but only, of course, after we have learned the rules. Not just any type of learning will do. A rule has to be *internalized* in such a way that it takes its place in a coherent *rule system*. Children internalize rules much more rapidly than adults. Appreciation of a verse form might be easier for children exposed to it during the critical phase of language acquisition.

1.10 Syllable Weight, Stress Placement, and English Rhyme

Let us consider what happens when we place stress correctly in some long English words borrowed from Classical languages. Starting from the right edge of the word, we move from the last syllable (the *ultima*) to the one before it (the *penult*) and inspect this syllable for weight. If the penult is heavy, we put the stress there; if it is light, we move leftward one syllable more (to the *antepenult*) and put the stress there. All this happens without conscious effort in a small fraction of a second. In *de.sí.rous*, the penult receives stress because its nucleus contains a *tense vowel*. The penult in *tre.mén.dous* receives stress because the [n] consonant in its coda makes it heavy by position. In *pre.cí.pi.tous*, the penult is light, with a lax vowel in its nucleus and an empty coda. Stress accordingly falls on the antepenult.

In canonical English rhymes, the matching domain extends from a stressed syllable to the end of the word. Our linguistic example *tremé.dous* rhymes canonically with *stupé.dous* but not with *outrá.geous*. *Precí.pitous* rhymes canonically with *sè.rendí.pitous* but not with *emé.ritus*. We survey these matching domains by intuition every time we pronounce the words. Identifying *rhymes* at the speed of recitation requires little added effort.

One of the rules for canonical rhyme requires a specific kind of aesthetic variety. In stressed syllables that initiate rhyming sequences, onsets must *not* match exactly. *Pain* rhymes canonically with *com.pláin* because there is inexact matching between the onsets [p] and [pl]. *Plain* does not rhyme canonically with *com.pláin* because both words have the same [pl] onset in their stressed syllables. It is notoriously difficult to formulate a general rule

for placement of syllable boundaries, especially when more than two consonants stand between vowels; but poetic audiences have strong intuitions about where those boundaries lie. When I have students evaluate rhymes, a substantial majority of the class will vote against *plain/complain* but will have no problem with *plain/explain*. These preferences make no sense if we place the syllable boundary between the prefix and the **root**. It seems that *com-* and *ex-* have different effects on syllable division. As it turns out, the students also prefer *panned/expand* to *spanned/expand* and *tent/extent* to *stent/extent*. In the examples with the prefix *ex-*, evidently, the students perceive a syllable boundary between the [k] and [s] sounds represented by the letter < x >. A less artificial spelling shows unacceptable onset identity in *spanned/ek.spand* and *stent/ek.stent* but appropriate onset contrast in *plain/ek.splain*, *panned/ek.spanned*, and *tent/ek.stent*.

We now ascend from the level of fine detail to consider some higher-level characteristics of **rhyme** and **alliteration**, the sound echoes most widely used and appreciated during the evolution of English. These echoes are engineered to be conspicuous. Each is situated within a major sub-constituent of the syllable: alliteration in the onset, rhyme – well – in the rhyme. We encounter **sound echoes** during routine processing of linguistic constituents and their low probability of occurrence in ordinary speech is detected at once as we exercise our powers of linguistic pattern recognition. These specialized powers can facilitate comparison with ordinary speech only if the **sound echoes** are apprehended as patterns of the poet's language. Sound echoes do not attract our attention in the manner of a rhythmically creaking tree soon to be snapped by a windstorm and do some damage. They are linguistic events that transcend the **acoustic signal**, as Irish alliteration clearly shows. In technical language, sound echoes must be linguistically *encoded*.²⁷ Sound echoes are further emphasized by placement strategies that lower the probability of chance occurrence. As we have seen, these can include proximity, frequency, and specified location in a metrical domain such as the line or stanza. Within the **line**, canonical English **rhyme** begins in the rightmost constituent of the rightmost syllable with metrically significant stress. Old English **alliteration** begins in the leftmost constituent of the leftmost syllable with metrically significant stress. Ideally, a sound echo will bring significant concepts into productive relations, promoting extended meditation on themes developed at the literal level.

Choosing words for sound echoes is rather like choosing words for a headline. In "WAR DECLARED," for example, discarding the unstressed function word *is* makes the content words more salient and

allows for use of larger headline type within the same number of column inches. In the hands of a skilled poet, *sound echoes foreground* key words and displace less important words to a background of routine functioning.

1.II Line and Sentence Boundaries

English poetry need not employ stanzas. Iambic pentameter can be effective without rhyme, as the textbook example of Milton's "blank verse" demonstrates. It would not be so easy to dispense with the line, the domain within which meters are generally defined. In traditional meters, *line* boundaries typically coincide with the boundaries of a sentence or clause. This relation between metrical and syntactic domains shows up visually in item (2), our Shakespeare sonnet, which has a comma, a full stop, or a question mark at the end of every line but one. The visually exceptional line 11 is a clause derived from a sentence by adding *nor* and repositioning *shall* before *death*.

When *line* boundaries and sentence boundaries fail to coincide in iambic pentameter, we notice a certain dissonance. The term *enjambment* bears witness to this effect. In a poem with short *lines*, however, little dissonance will be perceived if the line is realized as a phrase below the level of the sentence. Consider item (5), "The Tyger," by William Blake.²⁸

- (5) Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
 In the forests of the night:
 What immortal hand or eye
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
- In what distant deeps or skies
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes? 5
 On what wings dare he aspire?
 What the hand dare seize the fire?
- And what shoulder, and what art
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
 And when thy heart began to beat, 10
 What dread hand and what dread feet?
- What the hammer? What the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil? What dread grasp
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp? 15
- When the stars threw down their spears
 And water'd heaven with their tears,

Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

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An unusual feature of Blake's poem is use of the question as the only sentence type. Four lines are independent sentences: *On what wings dare he aspire?*, *What the hand dare seize the fire?*, *In what furnace was thy brain?*, and *Did he who made the Lamb make thee?* The second of these sentences is compressed, deleting words that can be understood from context. In *idiomatic* contemporary English, this would be *What was the hand that would dare to seize the fire?* Omission of *was* after *what* fits language to meter in other lines as well. Several *lines* are realized as the modified sentences called clauses. Line 17, for example, is a sentence transformed into a subordinate clause by the conjunction *when*. A change of word order in line 6 would yield an independent sentence: *The fire of thine eyes burnt*. Other lines are realized as phrases within a larger clause or sentence. Line 2 is a prepositional phrase. Line 3 is a large subject noun phrase and line 4 completes the sentence with a large predicate (or *verb phrase*). Although *syntactically complete* sentences would often be too long for Blake's *line*, a bare subject or predicate would be too short. In *What immortal hand or eye*, a complex subject *what hand or eye* is modified by *immortal*, which fills out the metrical pattern. The following predicate has an auxiliary verb (*could*) as well as a main verb (*frame*) and the object noun *symmetry* is modified by *thy* and *fearful*. Stanza three begins with a similar pair of lines. Here too an elaborate subject, *what shoulder and what art*, is followed by an elaborate predicate, *could twist the sinews of thy heart*. Since subject and predicate are the major sub-constituents of the sentence, the boundary between them is the most natural point of division in a sentence too large for a single *line*. The same principle of division applies in phrases below the level of the sentence. The most natural point of division is always at the *major syntactic break* between the two largest sub-constituents.

New kinds of metrical *complexity* are introduced in stanza four. Line 13 consists of two short sentences that omit understood words. In line 15, a similar short sentence is followed by a sentence too large for the rest of the line. Here the poet departs in two ways from Shakespeare's norm, beginning a sentence in the middle of the *line* and ending the *line* in the middle of a sentence. These departures from the norm create more

complexity than either departure in isolation. They have a strong *additive effect*. In Blake's poem, the increase in *metrical complexity* supports a mounting tension, bewilderment, and terror developed on the literal level.

Metrical complexity tends to peak before the end of a poem and then diminish to a point of rest. An important universal is the *principle of closure*, a tendency toward stricter adherence to metrical norms at the end of a metrical unit such as a *line*, a stanza, or a whole work.²⁹ Stanza five in Blake's poem is markedly less complex than stanza four. No sentences begin inside a line. The first three lines are complete clauses and the closing line, a complete sentence, adheres perfectly to Shakespeare's norm. Stanza six is an almost exact repetition of the opening stanza. Having done the work of scansion already, the reader will perceive stanza six as metrically simple. The one new word in the stanza, *dare*, registers our progress through the complex developmental phase in the middle of the work. Closing a work of art with a formal return to the beginning is a universal technique.³⁰ In Irish syllabic meters, the last *line* of a poem with six quatrains would typically echo the first line. Three types of echoing return are explicitly defined in the bardic commentaries.³¹

In addition to the principle of closure, there is an *introductory principle*, a tendency to moderate *complexity* at the beginning of a metrical unit. Consider item (6), “Pied Beauty” by Gerard Manley Hopkins.³²

- (6) Glory be to God for dappled things –
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim. 5
- All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him. 10

“Pied Beauty” is a radically modified sonnet form and most of its lines are complex *realizations* of iambic pentameter that cannot be found in Shakespeare, Milton, or Pope.³³ Such an experimental form requires careful introduction. This task is accomplished by line 1, a complete sentence with a rhythm employed by Shakespeare. From then until line 10, no line uses a Shakespearean rhythm and no line is realized as a complete sentence.³⁴ A reader not prompted by line 1 would probably fail to identify

lines 2–9 as experiments with a traditional meter. In the middle of the poem, the fragmented grammatical constructions are quite unusual and there is little sentence structure of the ordinary kind. Hopkins's closure begins in line 10, a complete sentence with a Shakespearean rhythm. Because lines in the main body of the poem are never realized as complete sentences, line 10 provides a salient echo of the first line. The shortened final line, a simple, perfectly *idiomatic* sentence, also provides semantic *closure* by echoing the call to worship in the opening line.

1.12 Dissonance in Poetry and Music

Abstracting away from the poetic medium, we can compare *enjambment* with harmonic dissonance, the most thoroughly studied kind of aesthetic tension. In Western classical music and its descendants, the most important technique of *closure* is a progression from the dominant seventh chord to the tonic chord, for example from G seventh to C major in the key of C. Any pop music fan knows by intuition that this functions as a *cadence*, bringing a musical unit to an end. To perform the cadence on a piano, begin with a chord consisting of D, F, G, and B, in that order, starting with D just above middle C. Technically, this is the second inversion of a G seventh chord, the dominant seventh chord in the key of C. The notes closest together are F and G. What causes the dissonance is the narrow interval between these notes. To verify this, play F and G and compare that with the effect of playing any other two notes in the chord. The narrower interval between F-sharp and G will sound even more dissonant. Such dissonance can be exploited for various effects in various styles and traditions but it is grounded in the laws of physics and the anatomy of the human ear. When two notes are as close together as F and G, their sound waves disrupt one another and the ear hears this disruption as a kind of throbbing called a *beat*. Use of an inversion for the G seventh chord introduces another kind of complexity. In Western harmony, the normal position for G in a G chord is at the bottom. Now move from the G seventh inversion to a C major chord consisting of middle C, E, G, and the next higher C. Technically, this is the tonic major chord with an added octave. The octave keeps the number of notes at four, helping to create a sense of logical progression from one chord to another (an effective *voice leading*). The G of the G seventh chord remains in place and the other three notes move away from it in an orderly fashion to the next available place in the key of C. With the close interval between F and G removed, the dissonance ends. C appears at the bottom, its normal position in a C major chord, and the octave locates the chord even more

firmly in the key of C to provide emphatic closure. Whether in poetic or musical form, progressing from tension to release can bring artistic activity to an effective point of rest.³⁵

Aesthetic dissonance can be defined in terms of **mismatch**. The dominant seventh chord creates a mismatch between sound waves with a significance modulated by tradition and individual style. Approximate rhyme creates a mismatch between **phonemes** with a significance modulated in the same way. “Slant rhymes” like *flap/hat* stand out in Sylvia Plath’s poetry but would be unremarkable in an early Irish poem. Rhymes like *furs/players*, never used by Shakespeare or Pope, might appear in an American popular song and would qualify as *rinn* and *airdrinn* in a stanza of strict Irish *deibide*.³⁶

Enjambment is a mismatch between the syntax of a poetic **line** and our expectation that the line will be realized as a sentence. In item (7), consider the mismatches with expected syntax that arise as sentences from Shakespeare’s sonnet are repositioned.

- (7) (a) Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
 and summer’s lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 (b) more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds
 do shake the darling buds of May and summer’s
 lease hath all too short a date. Sometime
 (c) of May and summer’s lease hath all too short a
 date. Sometime too hot the eye of heaven
 shines, and often is his gold complexion

Items (7a–c) all have stress patterns acceptable to Shakespeare. Item (7a) shows the sentences as Shakespeare placed them; items (7b–c) have sentence boundaries internal to the line. In (7b), the subject *rough winds* is split from its predicate, *summer’s* is split from its modified noun, and the adverb *sometime* is split from the rest of its sentence. In (7c), the indefinite article *a* is split from its modified noun and *the eye of heaven* is split from its predicate. The most extreme dissonances occur when a **line** is split at the minor **syntactic break** within a two-word phrase, a break like the one between *a* and *date*. No such enjambment occurs in Shakespeare’s sonnets or in *Pied Beauty*, which is quite experimental in other ways. This type of enjambment does occur in later experimental poems.³⁷ Even more extreme enjambment occurs in the poetry of E. E. Cummings, who sometimes splits a **simplex** word with the **line** boundary.³⁸

1.13 The Metrical System in Universalist Poetics

In a universalist theory, metrical principles are formulated to apply within all relevant styles and traditions. The principle of *closure*, for example, states that metrical norms apply more strictly toward the end of a metrical unit, abstracting away from the norms and units of particular meters. As in any theory of a coherent phenomenon, universalist principles must fit within an internally consistent system.³⁹

Metrical matching is a relation between words chosen by the poet and the idealized language of the metrical pattern, which serves as a sort of mental yardstick placed against the poet's words. A *line* of poetry is *complex* to the extent that its linguistic constituents *mismatch* constituents of the metrical pattern. This style of analysis matches poetry in any language against norms of the same language and accordingly qualifies as universalist. Since the human mind is so well equipped to process language, the idealized language of the pattern is available for instantaneous comparison and an audience of native speakers can apprehend *mismatches* at the speed of oral performance.

1.14 A Universal Constraint on the Number of Words Per Line

The poetic line is subject to a *universal word constraint*. The average number of words per line must be no greater than nine and is usually no smaller than five.⁴⁰ This poetic universal follows from *chunking constraints* in cognitive psychology, which reflect the limited capacity of certain powerful memory functions.⁴¹ The relevant function for our purposes, called *rehearsal memory*, has an important aesthetic significance. It facilitates what Abhinavagupta, a tenth-century analyst of Indic meter, called "savoring."⁴² From a *universalist* perspective it is no accident that sententious wisdom coincides so frequently with a poetic line, as in "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." To construct that memorable sentence, Shakespeare uses seven words, dead center in the universal range. Chunking of poetic language into lines with a limited number of words parallels chunking of discourse into clauses and sentences. To process poetic echoes, we draw on our internalized phonological rules. To process a poetic line, we also draw on our *internalized* syntactic rules. As we parse each sentence intuitively to understand what the poet is saying, we do the linguistic analysis required for scansion, unconsciously and with no perceptible effort.

1.15 Regulation of Syllable Count

Like Irish syllabic poetry, canonical iambic pentameter counts syllables. To capture such requirements, we need to enrich our notation for the *line* with enumerated *metrical positions* that are normally occupied by one syllable each. Item (8) is a partial notation for iambic pentameter, which has ten syllables in its basic form. Greek “s” (σ) stands for “syllable.” Syllable boundaries are notated with a point as before. The labeled bracketing indicates that an *optimal line* is realized as a sentence.

(8) [σ.σ.σ.σ.σ.σ.σ.σ.σ.σ]_{sentence}

Matching these idealized σ positions to real syllables is not always straightforward because words can have ambiguous syllable counts. The citation form of a word is often altered in ordinary conversation and the difference may become more extreme in rapid speech registers. I often hear Noah Adams, a radio broadcaster, pronounce his name as if it were *No Adams*. Such *prosodic variants* seldom interfere with comprehension and may eventually develop into rules of grammar, as with the *sandhi* rules of Sanskrit and Irish.⁴³ Written English *do not* becomes *don’t* quite systematically in my conversational register. I reserve *do not* for special effects, with contrastive or emphatic stress on *not*.

When we interact routinely with other speakers, we acquire an easy familiarity with variant prosodic values of their words. Poets trade on this kind of facility, using one value or another as desired.⁴⁴

- (9) (a) *Unlooked on diest unless thou get a son* (Son. 7.14)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (b) *When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!* (Son. 43.8)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (c) *That on himself such murderous shame commits* (Son. 9.14)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (d) *Thy youth’s proud livery, so gazed on now* (Son. 2.3)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (e) *Or ten times happier, be it ten for one* (Son. 6.8)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (f) *Who? Sylvia? Aye, Sylvia, for your sake* (TGV, 4.2.23)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (g) *I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought* (Son. 30.3)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ
 (h) *Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase* (Son. 11.5)
 σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ σ

In canonical iambic pentameter, an unstressed vowel immediately adjacent to another vowel may be assigned to one or two **metrical positions** as required. The syllabic value of boldface linguistic material in item (9) is shown by the number of boldface σ positions below it. For normal scansion, the linguistic material in boldface must be interpreted as monosyllabic in (9a) and as disyllabic in (9b). Items (9c–d) show possible values for a sequence of two unstressed vowels separated by a semivowel (*l*, *m*, *n*, or *r*). The assignment of two vowels to one **metrical position** in (9e) reflects a variant pronunciation of the high front vowel [i] as the semivowel [y] when an unstressed vowel follows. In (9f), *Sylvia* takes on disyllabic and trisyllabic values in a single line. The high back vowel [u] can also lose syllabic value before an unstressed vowel, becoming the semivowel [w]. English poets show awareness of such variation by using words like *casual* either as disyllables or as trisyllables. Items (9g–h) show alternative syllabic values for unstressed vowels that become adjacent across a word boundary in fluent speech.

We are so adept at evaluating prosodic alternatives that pronunciation seems not to matter. Try each pronunciation of *Sylvia* in both locations as you recite (9f), for example. Pronunciation may seem irrelevant even when the listener uses only one of the two variants. My invariant pronunciations of *murderous* and *livery* are the opposite of those represented in (9c–d), yet I noticed nothing odd about the lines when I read through the sonnets in search of examples. Some traditional meters employ archaic variants that are not pronounced during performance and never occur in ordinary conversation.⁴⁵

Variant syllabic values are the inevitable result of ambiguity in linguistic material. When two vowels are adjacent, they shorten each other and their linguistic duration falls below the norm for two syllables.⁴⁶ A sequence of two adjacent vowels is shorter than normal for two σ positions and longer than normal for one σ position. Requiring optimal length on every σ position would exclude important words from poetry altogether, imposing an oppressive constraint on expression of ideas. The viable alternative allows ambiguous sequences to take on either of their approximate values. As the term *semivowel* implies, [y] and [w] are intermediate between vowels and consonants. Even in the shorter pronunciations of *Sylvia* and *casual*, the semivowels [y] and [w] might plausibly occupy σ positions.

1.16 Metrical Constituents as Optimal Linguistic Constituents

Let us now step back to consider the σ position as a theoretical entity. We can capture the metrical facts by defining σ positions as idealized

syllables with optimal linguistic form. Scansion then becomes a matter of matching optimal syllables with real syllables, some of which depart from optimal form.

English iambic pentameter distinguishes *strong metrical positions*, normally occupied by stressed syllables, from *weak metrical positions*, normally occupied by unstressed syllables. Stress is intimately associated with vowel tension and syllable length. The normal duration for a stressed syllable is roughly twice the normal duration for an unstressed syllable. In some linguistics publications, a short or lax vowel is notated as V and a long or tense vowel as VV, where each V stands for a unit of vowel length called a *mora* (Latin for ‘delay’).⁴⁷ As idealized stressed syllables, strong metrical positions will normally be occupied by two morae. In items (9a–b), the stressed vowels in *diest* and *unseeing* occupy *strong positions*. Since these stressed vowels are shortened before a following unstressed vowel, they have subnormal duration for the position they occupy. Optimal duration takes priority in (9a), where the short stressed vowel shares the strong position with the following unstressed vowel. Optimal one-to-one matching of syllables with metrical positions takes priority in (9b), where the unstressed vowel occupies its own *weak position* and the stressed vowel provides an inexact but acceptable match for the strong position.

Metrical Lines as Idealized Sentences

For intuitive scansion in real time, a line-length metrical unit would be realized most effectively as a self-contained linguistic domain like a simple sentence (a sentence with no internal clauses). The simple sentence is the smallest domain within which words combine to form meaningful *propositions*. A *line* realized as a simple sentence will have semantic as well as syntactic integrity.

Metrical Feet as Idealized Words

Between syllabic constituents and syntactic constituents we find morphological constituents. These usually coincide with entities we think of as words. A word-sized metrical constituent called the *foot* is commonly assumed to exist at a level of structure between the metrical position and the line. The foot has occasioned much controversy among theorists of poetic form.⁴⁸ Several prominent researchers have denied that the foot has genuine metrical significance.⁴⁹ These researchers analyze traditional English verse forms as patterns of weak and strong metrical positions and

do not group the positions into feet. On the other hand, “Poets and critics have generally insisted on the reality of the foot.”⁵⁰

Kiparsky justifies the foot concept by showing that **foot** boundaries must align with word boundaries in **lines** with unusual stress placements. Marking the foot boundary with a word boundary in such cases keeps the total **complexity** of the line within tolerable limits during oral performance. If matching of foot boundaries with word boundaries is the simplest option, lines like (10a) ought to be less complex than those like (10b). Square brackets in these lines from Shakespeare represent foot boundaries.

- (10) (a) [*Awákes*] [*my héart*] [*to héart's*] [*and éye's*] [*delight*] (Son. 47.14)
 (b) [*And ón-*] [*ly hér-*] [*ald to*] [*the gáud-*] [*y spring*] (Son. 1.10)

All stressed syllables occupy strong metrical positions in (10a) and (10b). The two lines differ primarily with regard to **bracketing mismatches**, which occur when a **foot** boundary fails to coincide with a word boundary. There are three such mismatches in (10b), where the foot boundary splits trochaic words. The predicted difference is inconspicuous because iambic pentameter employs a fixed **line** pattern known to the audience in advance. As we shall see, some meters employ a wide variety of *verse types* that occur at unpredictable intervals. Such meters would be quite unworkable without severe restrictions on **bracketing mismatches**. In a predictable meter, on the other hand, adhering too closely to the basic pattern runs the risk of metrical banality.

It is no simple matter to validate a theory that explains departures from metrical norms systematically rather than listing a few recurrent features of the line. In working toward an explanatory theory, Kiparsky observes, “we have to leave the comfortable data of what poets do and don’t do, and rely rather on various necessarily delicate judgments of relative metrical **complexity**, preferred scansion, and so forth.” To guard against biasing his own theory, Kiparsky argues from subjective reactions of expert writers and readers. These include poets like Goethe and Hopkins as well as literary critics like Saintsbury, Egerton Smith, and Nowotny. All members of the expert panel sense a trochaic counterpoint in passages of iambic meter with an unusually high frequency of trochaic words. “It is significant,” Kiparsky says, “that precisely here, far away from all academic metrical theory, we find again and again the spontaneous expressions of an intuition that no metrical theory so far to my knowledge has explicated: that the meter of a **line** is determined, even against the metrical context, by the predominant metrical structure of the *words* in it.” As we shall see in **Chapter 10**, the

importance of metrical word structure stands out with special clarity in the *Gawain* poet's iambic trimeter, which routinely allows two unstressed syllables between stresses, sometimes three. Freer employment of unstressed syllables in this meter is offset by stricter placement of iambic and trochaic words.

1.17 Permissible Mismatches in Iambic Pentameter

We now enrich our representation of the **iambic** pentameter **line** with bracketed **foot** units and subdivide σ positions into two types, strong (S) and weak (x). For compactness, σ = syllable, *wd* = word, and *sst* = simple sentence.

$$(11) \quad [[[x]_{\sigma} [S]_{\sigma}]_{wd} [[x]_{\sigma} [S]_{\sigma}]_{wd} [[x]_{\sigma} [S]_{\sigma}]_{wd} [[x]_{\sigma} [S]_{\sigma}]_{wd} [[x]_{\sigma} [S]_{\sigma}]_{wd}]_{sst}$$

The labeled bracketing is interpreted to mean (1) that the **line** is abstracted from a simple sentence; (2) that the line is subdivided into five foot patterns abstracted from words; (3) that each foot is subdivided into two **metrical positions** abstracted from syllables; (4) that the first position of each foot is abstracted from an unstressed syllable; and (5) that the second position of each foot is abstracted from a syllable with primary **word stress**. The constituents of this mental yardstick provide norms for evaluating the syllables, words, and syntactic structures chosen by the poet.

Although Shakespeare's line seems to permit a bewildering diversity of rhythmical variation, Kiparsky shows that much variation can be captured by three options:

- 1 An unstressed syllable may occupy a **strong position**.
- 2 A stressed monosyllable may occupy a **weak position**.
- 3 At the beginning of a phrase, clause, or sentence, any stressed syllable may occupy a **weak position**.

Option 1 allows "**pyrrhic feet**" without stress that neither support nor disrupt the norm, as with a musical rest in a place normally occupied by an accented note. A musical analogue for option 2 is employment of an accented note in an unexpected place, a kind of syncopation featured in improvised jazz. Placement of stress on metrical weak positions must be managed carefully to avoid an inadvertent change of rhythm. Option 3 capitalizes on the fact that stress, an inherently relative phenomenon, is difficult to evaluate in the first syllable of a phrase or sentence, where there is no possibility of comparison with a preceding syllable in the same phrase.

Options 1–3 are used routinely, with more than one option frequently taken in a single line.

- (12) (a) [*Beauteous*][*thou art*], [*therefore*][*to be*][*assailed*] (Son. 41.6)
 (b) [*Than are*][*dreamt of*][*in your*][*philó-*][*sophy*] (Hamlet, 1.5.167)
 (c) [*And yét*] [*dark night*][*strangles*][*the trável-*][*lìng lãmp*] (Macbeth, 2.4.7)

The relevant stresses are marked with an acute accent in (12a–b). In (12a), option 1 is taken in the fourth foot. Though usually unstressed, the function word *art* acquires clause-final stress in the second foot of this line and occupies a strong position. Option 3 allows stress on the first syllable of the line, which is the first syllable in its sentence, and option 1 allows an unstressed syllable on the following strong position. The result is a common type of **trochaic inversion**. In the third foot, option 3 would permit stress on the first syllable of *therefore*, which is the first syllable in its clause.⁵¹ In (12b), the first, second, and third feet take option 1. The second foot also takes option 2 to place a stressed monosyllable on a weak position. Because *philósophy* has more than one syllable and its internal stress cannot appear at the beginning of a phrase, this stress must always occupy a strong position, as in (12b). In (12c), option 2 is taken in the second foot, where monosyllabic *dark* occupies a weak position, and option 3 is taken in the third foot, where *strangles* stands after the subject at the beginning of the predicate (the verb phrase).

Shakespeare's effort to keep variation within limits is easy to appreciate when we consider more radical departures from the underlying pattern.

- (13) (a) [*Creá-*][*ted thee*][*in the*][*ímage*][*of Gód*] (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 7.527)
 (b) [*Prófit-*][*less ú-*][*surer*], [*why dost*][*thou úse*] (Son. 4.6)
 (c) [*In váine*][*this séá*][*shall en-*][*lárge or*][*en-róugh*] (Donne, *Pr. Soul*, 52)

In (13a), Milton mismatches the fourth iambic foot with a trochaic word. The boldface mismatch is not sanctioned by Shakespeare's option 2 or 3 because *ímage* is not a monosyllable and is not preceded by a major syntactic break. There are no **bracketing mismatches** in the fourth foot, however. Milton's system allows such **trochaic inversions** when and only when the boundaries of the foot are matched by word boundaries. Milton's option is not just a looser version of option 3, which involves less conspicuous stress mismatches and imposes no compensatory restrictions on word boundaries. In (13b), for example, Shakespeare's first foot has a rightward bracketing mismatch in addition to mismatch of the inconspicuous phrase-initial stress. Milton's effort to keep trochaic inversion within self-imposed limits is highlighted by Donne's even more radical mismatches. In (13c), cited by Kiparsky from *The Progress of the Soul*, Donne splits *enlárge* with

the **foot** boundary, creating a bracketing mismatch and a **stress mismatch** with the same word.

A trochaic word will always create a mismatch in an iambic line. Given the diversity of the English word stock, Shakespeare could hardly avoid such mismatches in a genre of personal feeling. With few exceptions, English iambic words are prestigious borrowings from French or Latin, exotics that have flourished in the discourse of the public sphere since AD 1066, when speakers of Old English were conquered by speakers of Norman French. Iambic pentameter held sway for so long partly because it accommodated a prestige style register. In discourses of the domestic sphere and the personal axis, on the other hand, native English words with initial stress predominate. What makes iambic pentameter workable as well as prestigious is the high frequency of English phrases with a monosyllabic unstressed word followed by a monosyllabic stressed word. This iambic phrasal constituent is subject to a weaker form of the constraint on iambic words.

- (14) (a) [*For góod*] [*is the*] [*life, énd-*] [*ing fáith-*] [*fully*]
 (b) [*And she*] [*me cáught*] [*in her*] [*árms lóng*] [*and smáll*]
 (c) [*Pronóunce*] [*thee a*] [*gròss lóut*], [*a mínd-*] [*less sláve*]

Items (14a–b) are from a well-known sonnet by Wyatt, *The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar*. Item (14c) is from *The Winter's Tale* by Shakespeare (1.2.301). According to Kiparsky, Shakespeare's metrical sub-system rules out lines like (14a–b). Shakespeare treats closely bound phrases like *the life* and *her arms* as word-like iambic constituents that should not normally be split by the **foot** boundary. This constraint is weaker than the one for iambic words, permitting exceptions when the mismatched stress is subordinated to a more prominent stress within the same phrase. In (14c), the mismatched stress on *gròss*, marked by a grave accent, is subordinated to stress on *lóut* in the same phrase, and the foot has an iambic stress contour despite the mismatch. In the lines from Wyatt, on the other hand, phrase boundaries separate *life* from *ending* and *arms* from *long*. There is no stress subordination in *the life* or *her arms* and the bracketing mismatches created by these small phrases would be unacceptable to Shakespeare.

Kiparsky's discoveries can be explained by a "word-foot" theory that derives foot patterns from word patterns.⁵² Just as **metrical positions** are abstracted from syllables and **metrical lines** from sentences, so metrical feet are abstracted from words. A stressed monosyllable has no inherent word rhythm and cannot impose a contrary rhythm within an iambic line. A stressed trochaic word, on the other hand, embodies a trochaic rhythm

and complicates the iambic line with a [stress mismatch](#) or a [bracketing mismatch](#), depending on how the trochaic word is placed. An iambic word embodies an iambic rhythm. Placed within an iambic foot, it supports the meter. Straddling the foot boundary, it disrupts the meter with simultaneous stress and bracketing mismatches. In the discourse of the personal axis, closely bound iambic word groups can support the meter, compensating for a dearth of iambic words in intimate conversational English. The less severe constraints on such word groups show that their inherent [foot](#) rhythm is somewhat less salient than the foot rhythm of iambic words, causing less severe disruption when straddling the foot boundary.

1.18 Varieties of Traditional Poetic Form

Our [universalist](#) approach can be expressed as a coherent set of fundamental principles.

- P1 [Metrical positions](#) are abstracted from syllables.
- P2 Metrical [feet](#) are abstracted from words, and any word-counting meter is a foot-counting meter.
- P3 [Metrical lines](#) are abstracted from simple sentences.
- P4 Norms for a metrical constituent are abstracted from norms for the corresponding linguistic constituent.
- P5 A poetic meter must employ the [line](#).

Within limits imposed by the universal word constraint ([section 1.14](#)), the poet is free to specify a number of [metrical positions](#) or feet within a line. The number of lines in larger units such as couplets, stanzas, and whole works can also be fixed artificially. With these exceptions, which are not norms in the strict sense, traditional norms must be rooted in language for effective communication with the audience. Any norms for [metrical positions](#) must be derived from norms for syllables in the relevant language. Any norms for metrical [feet](#) must be derived from norms of word formation. Norms for the [line](#) must be derived from norms for simple sentences. In a meter that persists through a long period of linguistic development, archaic norms may play a role alongside norms of the poet's era. In a meter borrowed from another language, norms of the original language may play a role. Properly constructed, a [universalist](#) theory should explain a variety of metrical facts. Departures from norms should restrict frequency and inhibit placement toward the end of a metrical unit, in accord with the [principle of closure](#). In the following chapters I will use a universalist theory to explain what previous researchers have observed about English

meters. The theory will also bring to light some metrical facts that have not been noticed before.

Principle P₅ specifies the line as the only obligatory metrical constituent, allowing for unfooted lines and for lines without metrical positions. P₅ does not, of course, rule out the kind of prose poetry that we identify by its meditative emphasis and avoidance of “blow-by-blow” narrative syntax. Authors who compose this kind of poetry might say that they are not using a form and would certainly not claim to be using a meter. Their literary art raises problems of great linguistic interest, for example identifying the features of word choice, syntax, sentence rhythm, and discourse structure that distinguish prose poems from essays. Here, however, our focus is on the structure and history of English meters. Before proceeding to historical topics, it will be worthwhile to consider a variety of meters consistent with principles 1–5.

Lines that Do Not Employ Feet or Metrical Positions

Without feet or metrical positions, one might think, the lines of a poem would simply be prose sentences with nine words or fewer on average. Sentences have syntactic structures, however, and these structures can be matched. Since the sentence is the domain within which syntax integrates word meanings into **propositions**, sentence matching will involve semantics as well as syntax. **Parallelistic verse-lines** in the biblical psalms illustrate this kind of matching. Due to the great structural diversity of sentences, a fixed parallelistic line pattern would be far too restrictive. When **foregrounded** by proximity, however, matched semantic-syntactic patterns can serve as effective line patterns. The verse-lines of a biblical couplet define each other as instances of the same line pattern; and the matching features in these lines, though quite various, are not at all difficult to apprehend, even in the King James translation:

- (15) *To bind their kings with chains,
 and their nobles with fetters of iron?* (Psalm 149:8)

Matching of syntax and semantics stands out in (15) even though *to bind* is unexpressed in the second line and *chains* is varied as *fetters of iron*. Such effects have inspired a parallelistic tradition of American folk preaching.⁵³ Since it does not regulate sound patterns, this meter could be used in any human language, even in a sign language.

In his analysis of Semitic meters, Jerzy Kuryłowicz assumes that syntactic **parallelism** should be excluded from the province of metrics along with other “stylistic factors.”⁵⁴ Psalm meter, he thinks, counts metrical word

complexes, word groups that have a stressed constituent and optional constituents with no stress or subordinate stress. It is not clear how metrical word complexes could be enumerated by intuition at the speed of performance. Attempts to formulate stress rules for biblical psalms have not been persuasive. Wilfred Watson expresses current skepticism.

The most noticeable aspect of Hebrew metre when described in accentual terms (aside from different ways of scanning by scholars) is that no single poem is consistently written in one metrical pattern . . . It is this *lack of regular metre* [Watson's italics] which jars those brought up on (Indo-) European verse and it has to be accepted as part and parcel of the Hebrew verse tradition.⁵⁵

Watson's judgment favors the hypothesis that the Hebrew verse-line is an idealized sentence not subdivided into feet or metrical positions. This hypothesis does not rule out appreciation of the rhymes, alliterations, and rhythmical echoes that sometimes occur in the psalms.⁵⁶ Such **ornamental** effects occur in all kinds of poetry but need to be set aside when we try to formulate traditional rules. Ornamental effects provide important evidence for **universalist** metrics, however, since they show that language-based patterns have intuitive appeal even when not foregrounded by poetic conventions. Hebrew **sound echoes** may not obey traditional rules but they can make sentence echoes more effective.

Lines with Metrical Positions but No Feet

The Slavic decasyllable is an unfooted **syllable-counting** meter with a mandatory word break (or *caesura*) between syllables four and five of the ten-syllable line. I have marked the caesura with a slash in item (16).⁵⁷

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (16) | <i>A César se / na me naljutijo</i> | And the emperor was angered at me, |
| | <i>Pa na mene / naljetljemu dao</i> | And he inflicted outlawry upon me, |
| | <i>Pa me danas / surgun učinijo</i> | And today he has exiled me, |
| | <i>A prati mi / ktebe u Bagdatu</i> | And sent me to you in Bagdad. |

Although the caesura has a fixed location, other word breaks are unrestricted. There are no constraints on stress placement. A notation for the Slavic decasyllable should not distinguish **strong positions** from **weak positions**. The Slavic poets studied by modern linguists were usually illiterate but could instantly detect a misplaced caesura in an otherwise traditional line composed as an experiment.⁵⁸ Word boundaries are **psychologically real** even for poets who do not know the word-spacing conventions of a written language. The Slavic caesura divides the **line**

asymmetrically into units of four and six syllables. The line stands out as a metrical unit in this tradition because it is the smallest unit of consistent size above the level of the metrical position.

Meters that regulate stress placement often have foot structure. In Old English meter, each verse consists of two feet and a verse pattern is a pair of foot patterns. Feet are normally realized as words in *Beowulf* – far more often than in iambic pentameter – and Old English foot patterns are based on patterns of **word stress** (Chapter 3). Stress placement can also be regulated in a meter that has **metrical positions** but no feet. In Middle English alliterative meter (Chapters 5–8), feet are no longer employed and verse patterns correspond to patterns of *phrasal stress*, that is, to patterns of relative prominence in syntactic structures with two or more words. In *Beowulf*, the verse is often realized as a small two-word phrase or a compound word. In Middle English poems like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the association of metrical stress with larger syntactic structures is highlighted by more frequent **realization** of the verse as a clause or sentence. The foot arose once more in English poetic tradition when iambic meters were introduced (Chapter 10). Like Old English meter, the new foot-counting meters employed **word stress** as the basis for metrical patterning.

In Homer's six-foot meter, the **caesura** rarely divides the **line** into identical three-foot units. Iambic pentameter, with its odd number of feet, cannot be halved. The line is readily identifiable in these traditions as the smallest unit of consistent size above the level of the foot. As we shall see, *metrical asymmetry* has played a crucial role in the evolution of English meter.

Lines with Feet but No Metrical Positions

According to principle 2, any word-counting meter is a foot-counting meter. In the most familiar European meters, the **line** iterates a single foot pattern with a specified ordering of strong and weak positions, such as the iamb (xS), the **trochee** (Sx), the anapest (xxS), or the dactyl (Sxx). Our **universalist** approach should not require metrical positions within the foot, however, as an ancient Celtic meter shows. Item (17) may be the earliest poem to survive in the Irish language. It seems to have been composed near the middle of the fifth century AD.⁵⁹

- (17) *Dind Rig, ród tomm tenbath,*
At the Fortress of Kings, red ridge of death by fire,
tricha fariach fó brón bebsat.
thirty sub-kings died in anguish.

Brúsius, brésius búire lond Labraid,
 He crushed them, he burnt them, fierce wrathful Labraid,
láith Elgae, aue Luircc Loíguire.
 the warrior of Elc, the grandson of Loíguire Lorcc.
Lugaid loíg, lond Sanb, Sétne,
 Lugaid Loíg, fierce Sanb, Sétne,
sochlae Coil Cobthach, mál Muiredach.
 Cobthach Coil the renowned, prince Muiredach.
Mandrais arma athair athar Ollamon,
 The father of the father of Ollam destroyed weapons;
oirt Moín maccu áin Augaini.
 Moín slew the sons of speedy Augaine.
Arddu deeib, doín dron, daurgráinne,
 A stout human, higher than the gods, an oak-seed,
glan, gablach, aue Luircc Loíguire.
 pure, branching, was the grandson of Loíguire Lorcc.

As the editor observes, word count is the predominant regularity in item (17).⁶⁰ Each **line** has five words. Although the number of words is regulated, syllable count varies and there are no constraints on stress patterning. Except for *Dind* in the first line and *aue* in the last line, every word **alliterates** with one or more adjacent words. As in *Beowulf*, a stressed word beginning with a vowel alliterates with any other such word, regardless of vowel quality. Carney indicates the syntactic integrity of each line with a punctuation mark at its rightward edge. Item (17) employs feet derived from words and lines derived from sentences but makes no use of metrical positions derived from syllables.

Monosyllabic Feet with Tone Contours

The predominant **line** in classical Chinese poetry is often described as one of five syllables.⁶¹ This line might also be described as one of five words, however, or even of five characters, since the words used by the poets are monosyllables represented by a single ideograph. Chinese monosyllables have **phonemic** tone contours: *ping* (level), *shang* (rising), *qu* (departing), and *ru* (entering). Rules for metrical lines specify locations at which particular tones are required or excluded.⁶² If the four tones are analogous to rule-governed levels of stress, words in the Chinese line will count as syllables with varying metrical value and will occupy metrical positions. It seems more straightforward, however, to interpret the Chinese monosyllables as patterned feet, taking *shang* words, for example, as tonal iambs. P2 mandates interpretation of word-counting meters as foot-counting

meters and I see no reason to modify this principle. I posit **metrical positions** only for meters that regulate syllable count independently of word count.

Metrical Positions that Are Also Feet and Lines

When there is evidence for foot structure and regulated syllable count, a monosyllabic word can function simultaneously as a metrical position, a foot, and a line. An Irish satiric poem realizes this possibility.⁶³

- (18) *Ro-cúala,*
 I have heard
ní tabair eochu ar dúana;
 he does not give stallions for poems;
do-beir a n-í as dúthaig dó,
 he gives what seems appropriate to him,
bó.
 a cow.

Since this form requires composition in quatrains, *bó* must realize a line. Since the stress pattern of the rhyming word is regulated, *bó* must realize a foot.⁶⁴ Since the meter counts syllables, *bó* must realize a metrical position. Bardic poets seem to have realized that *bó* is less natural as a line than as a foot or metrical position. The bluntness of the final line in this meter, which comes as a surprise, is registered by its Irish name, *deibide baisse fri tóin* ‘slap-on-the-buttocks deibide.’⁶⁵

1.19 Summary

Nigel Fabb and Morris Halle assume that “**lines** are sequences of syllables, rather than of words or phrases,” calling this “a fundamental property of metrical poetry.”⁶⁶ For these researchers, the possibility of **enjambment** shows that lines are not analogous to phrases and the possibility of ending the line within a word, as E. E. Cummings sometimes does, shows that there are no metrical constituents analogous to words. Fabb and Halle reject “approaches which assume that literary language is a development of ordinary language, using the resources already available to it.”⁶⁷ They also reject “the notion of ‘**foot**’ as a building block.”⁶⁸ Fabb and Halle do not confront Kiparsky’s evidence for the foot and their initial assumptions seem quite wrong-headed. If poetic lines do not normally correspond to phrases, the rarity of enjambment in popular and traditional poems has no explanation and enjambment in experimental poems cannot be

understood as an innovative challenge to the reader. Fabb and Halle acknowledge that enjambment has low frequency in English verse before the Romantic period but they fail to appreciate the significance of this fact. On their account, it seems impossible to explain why the term *enjambment* exists at all.

The syllable-based theory of Fabb and Halle is inherently incapable of explaining well-known facts about Old English meter, including some facts about what must or must not occur. I have called attention to these shortcomings in previous work.⁶⁹ In this book, however, I will concentrate on showing what can be accomplished by a theory that derives *metrical positions* from syllables, *metrical feet* from words, and *metrical lines* from simple sentences.

Indo-European and Germanic Meters

2.1 Linguistic and Metrical History

Musicians study the physics of the vibrating string for insight into the material basis of their art. Painters study the chemistry of pigments. Poets can learn in a similar way from linguistics. The material of poetry differs, however, in its relation to history. Physical and chemical properties of materials have not changed since *Beowulf* was composed, but English has undergone major changes since then. Such changes operate with impressive regularity in most words but not throughout the whole vocabulary. Words employed frequently are more resistant to change than words less firmly established in our minds. The most archaic English verbs mark the past tense with a change of root vowel, as in *sing/sang/sung* or *ride/rode/ridden*. These “strong” verbs have become familiar to us through frequent use. When they decline in frequency, their past-tense forms are vulnerable to modernization. Verbs like *travel* have replaced *fare* in many contexts and the strong past tense *fore* has been modernized to the “weak” past tense *fared*. Another complicating factor is dialect. Many varieties of English can be found within England and North America today, not to mention Africa, Australia, and the Indian subcontinent. Literary language makes special use of archaisms and dialectal variants. In lines like “Neither a borrower nor a lender be,” Shakespeare uses archaic placement of the verb to meet the requirements of iambic pentameter.¹ The Homeric poems employ dialectal variants for their metrical value.²

2.2 The Proto-Indo-European Era

The science of historical linguistics begins in 1786 with Sir William Jones, a British jurist serving in India. Jones had been studying Vedic Sanskrit, an archaic language of the Indian subcontinent that survives in poetry composed before 1000 BC. In a speech given to the Asiatic Society, which he

founded, Jones argued that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin must have “sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.”³ Since then it has become clear that this source, called Proto-Indo-European, was ancestral to languages as seemingly diverse as Hindi, Russian, Farsi, Armenian, Gaelic, and English. As Jones surmised, Proto-Indo-European died before the advent of writing and had to be reconstructed from the evidence of its linguistic descendants. In this undertaking, historical linguists focused on high-frequency words likely to resist change – words for numbers, family members, and objects of material culture already present 6,000 years ago. Research in the new field yielded large comparative inventories of words that are *cognate* (born together) and in which corresponding *phonemes* are related by *sound laws*. The initial [p] in an Indo-European word remains [p] in Latin but becomes [f] in English by Grimm’s law, for example. Latin *pater* corresponds to native English *father*. The Latinate stem *pecu-* in *pecuniary* corresponds to native English *fee*. When a language loses an Indo-European sound, the loss normally takes place in all relevant words. Initial [p] is lost systematically in Old Irish, which has *athir* as the cognate for Latin *pater* and *lán* ‘full’ as the cognate for the Latinate root *plen-* in English *plenty*.

2.3 Archaic Oral Formulas

The earliest poems in Indo-European languages were composed and transmitted orally with the help of traditional formulas, some of which lasted into the historical period. Cognate formulas related to glory, a core concept of heroic narrative, survive in the Homeric poems and the Rig-Veda. Homeric *kléos áphthiton* ‘undying glory,’ *méga kléos* ‘great fame,’ and *kléa andrôn* ‘glory of men’ correspond to Vedic Sanskrit *ákṣitam śrávas*, *máhi śrávas*, and *śrávas nṛṇām*. As Robert S. P. Beekes observes, “*ákṣitam* is only found in Sanskrit in this context and must therefore be an old survival.”⁴ The archaic status of the cognate Greek formula is shown by its employment as a woman’s name in prehistoric Linear B.⁵ The word for “glory” in these formulas is derived from a verb meaning “hear” that came to mean “what one hears about in heroic poetry.” Other cognates include Avestan *sravah*, Old Irish *clú*, Old Welsh *clod*, Latin *laus* (borrowed into English as *laud*), and Old English *hlýsa*, derived from the ancestor of *listen*. Western heroic traditions share some formulas with Eastern traditions. Old Irish *fo chlú* ‘good fame’ has a cognate in Avestan *vohu sravah*.

Watkins reconstructs an Indo-European formula for slaying of a serpent by a hero.⁶ A descendant of the verb in this formula appears in epithets for

some famous Germanic serpent-slayers, including Sigurd Fáfnisbani (slayer of Fafnir the dragon) and the god Thor, known as *orms ein-bani* ‘sole-slayer of the serpent’ (the giant serpent that encircles middle-earth). Norse *bani* corresponds to Old English *bana*, which survives in the literary style register as *bane*. Thor and the Norse heroes who follow his example correspond to “serpent-slaying” Indra in the Rig-Veda; to the Avestan Thraētaona, slayer of the dragon Aži Dahāka; and to the Hittite Tarhunt, slayer of the dragon Illuyanka.⁷

In oral-formulaic epic, the most stable formulas are those representing the cultural categories, narrative structures, and settings that persist from one story to another.⁸ The defining narrative structure of Indo-European heroic epic is defense of society against chaos monsters, which include giants as well as dragons. According to Watkins, the chaos monster is a “figuration of all that is anti-social.”⁹ This definition applies perfectly to the giants and dragons of *Beowulf*. The man-eating Grendel is an *ān-genga* ‘lone-walker’ (165a, 449a) who refuses to atone for his killings with compensation (154b–58b). The dragon killed by Beowulf (2538a–711a) hoards gold in a wasteland retreat, coming forth only to ravage his nearest neighbors. Beowulf, a giant-slayer, a dragon-slayer, the strongest warrior of his time (196a–97b), and the largest man his contemporaries have ever seen (247b–49a), bears a striking resemblance to Hercules, “the prototypical Greek hero.”¹⁰

2.4 The Role of the Poet in Heroic Narratives

Poets and non-combatant leaders support the hero. Beowulf’s first reward for dispatching Grendel is praise of his achievement by King Hrothgar’s court poet (lines 867b–915b). Beowulf’s status is not puffed up by scornful contrast with women or old men. When Hrothgar’s retainers declare that no one is more worthy of kingship than Beowulf, the poet stops the action to insist that Hrothgar’s glory is not diminished by old age (856–63). Hrothgar evaluates Beowulf’s achievements and the hero pays close attention to the old king’s advice (1700–86). Not surprisingly, Hrothgar turns out to be a poet, instructing and entertaining his followers to the accompaniment of a Germanic harp (2105–14). Beowulf acknowledges the glory of Queen Wealhtheow, who provides her own treasures and advice to young warriors (2016b–19b). Wealhtheow trains her daughter Freawaru for the same role in their culture of the gift (2020–29a). Wealhtheow’s gifts to Beowulf promote her own agenda, which differs in some ways from her husband’s.¹¹ The gifts include a neck-ring of such legendary value that the poet digresses to narrate its history of ownership (1192–231).

Poets and heroes may seem quite different from a contemporary perspective but their achievements were intertwined in ancient northwest Europe. Poets received gifts of heroic splendor. In the Old English poem that bears his name, *Widsith*, a wandering singer of tales, mentions a valuable neck-ring he received from the Gothic king Eormenric and goes on to praise Queen Ealhild, who gave him a ring of the same quality.

- (1) *Hyre loflengde geond londa fela*
 Her glory extended through many lands
þonne ic be songe secgan sceolde
 when in song I needed to say
hwær ic under swegle sēlast wisse
 where under heaven I knew that the best
goldhrodene cwēn giefte bryttian.
 gold-adorned queen distributed gifts. (*Widsith*, 99–102)

In these lines *Widsith* reciprocates the Gothic queen's gift with the gift of glory.¹²

The format of item (1) follows the usual conventions for Old English poetry. Each line is divided into two verses (also called *half-lines*), with extra space marking the point of division. Old English assesses the weight of stressed vowels in terms of length rather than *tenseness*.¹³ A macron is used to indicate vowel length, as with *hwær*, *sēlast*, and *cwēn* in item (1).¹⁴

In early Indo-European cultures, poets were lavishly rewarded for their skills, which required years of labor to develop.¹⁵ Poets spoke face-to-face with rulers and had significant power themselves. They were the main guarantors of continuity for cultures that transmitted law, history, and religion in oral poetry. We would expect few casual missteps in the work of these poets and its linguistic implications can be taken very seriously indeed.

2.5 The Proto-Indo-European Poetic Line

Like Slavic oral poets (section 1.18), Proto-Indo-European poets probably used a line with a fixed number of syllables and a mandatory word break at a fixed location. Item (2) comes from the *Avesta*, one of the earliest poems to survive in an Indo-European language.

- (2) *Kas-nā vahauš, Mazdā, dāmiš manahah?*
 'Who, Wise One, is the founder of good thinking?'

Item (2) has a mandatory word break after the fourth syllable of the line, marked with extra spaces by Robert S. P. Beekes in his discussion of Indo-

European meter.¹⁶ The ancient Greek meter of the Homeric poems seems to have evolved “by extension and fixation of elements already present in Indo-European prosody.”¹⁷ Its major innovation was to distinguish **strong positions** from **weak positions** throughout the line. Homer matches his **metrical positions** against long and short syllables, unlike Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope, who match their positions against stressed and unstressed syllables. In technical idiom, Homer’s line pattern is *quantitative*. Patterning of syllables was freest toward the beginning of the Indo-European **line** and most strictly regulated toward its end.¹⁸ The Homeric line seems to have evolved by gradual enlargement of the strictly regulated domain, moving from the end toward the beginning. This trajectory is explained by the **principle of closure**, a **universal** tendency toward adherence to metrical norms at the end of a metrical unit (section 1.11). The principle of closure also explains line-final constraints in meters based on stress rather than length. As we have seen (section 1.5), Irish syllabic meter regulates stress patterning only in the line-final word. Old Norse *dróttkvætt* employs a wide variety of verse patterns but requires a trochaic constituent at the end of every verse.¹⁹

2.6 Metrical Evolution in Early Western Europe

In Indo-European traditions west of Greece, the earliest surviving poems bear witness to important metrical changes. The innovating Western meters were stress-based and employed alliteration systematically to integrate constituents of the **line**. Poetry was still oral-formulaic and still focused on cultural preservation. The most likely cause of metrical change was a change from the movable Indo-European word accent, which was placed unpredictably, to a forceful stress accent on the first syllable of all accented words.

Initial stress and **alliteration** developed in all three Indo-European language groups of the ancient West: Italic, Celtic, and Germanic. Within the Italic group we find alliterative poetry in archaic Latin and also in Oscan and Umbrian, prehistoric languages of the Italian peninsula. Several alliterative meters survive in Old Irish, a member of the Goidelic subgroup that retained the largest number of Proto-Celtic features.²⁰ The most archaic Norse meter, *fornyrðislag*, is closely related to Old English, Old Saxon, and Old High German alliterative meters.

Initial stress has spread quite remarkably in areas of language contact. Joe Salmons explains the rise of initial stress in Italic, Germanic, and Celtic

as spreading within a contact area, offering two kinds of evidence.²¹ First, Celtic, Italic, and Germanic languages differ in ways that are hard to explain by descent from a common ancestor with initial stress. Secondly, independent shifts to initial stress in three neighboring languages at about the same time would be an unlikely coincidence.

Ancient Italic Poetry

Most researchers accept the hypothesis that early Italic languages had initial stress as the best way to explain prehistoric reduction of non-initial vowels and the evidence of Italic alliterative poetry.²² The poetic evidence is important because alliteration “seems to be found as an obligatory formal element only in languages where the stress regularly falls on the same syllable in the word, which then must be the alliterating syllable.”²³

Item (3) is from a farmer’s ritual quoted by Cato in his book on agriculture, the oldest surviving work of Latin prose.²⁴

- (3) *utique tu fruges, frumenta,*
 that (you) fruits, grain,
 uineta uirgultaque
 vineyards and orchards
 grandire beneque
 to grow and well
 euenire siris,
 to develop may allow,
 pastores pecuaque
 shepherds and cattle
 salua seruassis
 safe may keep

The meter of this passage was already archaic in 160 BC when *De Agri Cultura* was written. Item (3) is embedded in a larger ritual that mixes poetry with prose and it is hard to identify the generic boundaries precisely. Here it will suffice to consider the only passage with frequent alliteration. In item (3), five of the six lines have exactly two stressed words. Line 1 is exceptional if *utique tu* is included in the scansion. Stressed words alliterate in lines 1, 2, 5, and 6. There is no apparent regulation of stress patterns.

Cognate ritual poetry can be found in the bronze tables of Iguvium, the only texts of significant extent in Umbrian. As Watkins observes, an alliterative formula used frequently in the tables, *saluo seritu* ‘keep safe,’ corresponds to *salua seruassis* in the last line of Cato’s prayer.²⁵ Item (4) comes from a prayer for destruction of Iguvium’s enemy neighbors.²⁶

- (4) *tursitu tremitu*
terrify (them), cause (them) to tremble,
hondu holtu
cast (them) down, destroy (them),
ninctu nepitu
bury (them) with snow, overwhelm (them) with water,
sonitu sauitu
deafen (them) with thunder, wound (them),
preplotatu preuilatu
trample (them), bind (them)

The short lines in item (4) consist of two alliterating stressed words. Alliteration is most regular in these lines, which perform the curse, less regular in introductory material that specifies targets of the curse. The alphabet used in the oldest tables resembles alphabets on Etruscan inscriptions from the fifth, fourth, and third centuries BC. Poultney dates the oldest tables to the third century BC and judges that item (4) was copied from a lost text of earlier date.²⁷

Item (5) is a prayer in Oscan for destruction of an individual enemy, engraved about 100 BC on a lead tablet.²⁸

- (5) *aginss urinss úlleis*
(destroy) his actions, utterances,
fakinss fangvam
deeds, tongue,
biass biitam
strength, life,
aftiim anamúm
ability, soul,
aitatum amirikum
lifespan, livelihood

Item (5) has alliteration in every line and exactly two words in every line but the first. It could be recycled for a variety of enemies and looks like a traditional formulaic unit. Watkins provides detailed analysis of important cultural features shared by items (3), (4), and (5).²⁹

Ancient Irish Poetry

Like Italic alliterative meters, the archaic Irish meter discussed in [section 1.18](#) employs a [line](#) with a specified number of words but no specified rhythm. Other early Irish meters control rhythmical patterns as well as word count. Item (6) is a welcoming poem from the ninth century AD in [regulated word-foot meter](#). To facilitate comparison with Old English and

Old Norse poetry, I have reformatted examples of this meter in lines of two verses each, with extra space at the line-internal verse boundary.³⁰

- (6) *Fo-chen Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb,*
 Welcome, Labraid Swift-hand on Sword!
úallchu murib, manraid gossa,
 Prouder than chieftains, he destroys powers,
gníid cathu, criathraid ócu,
 he fights battles, he riddles warriors,
tocbaid lobru, tairnid triunu.
 he lifts up the weak, he casts down the strong.
Fo-chen Labraid.
 Welcome, Labraid.

Poems in regulated word-foot meter are often embedded in prose sagas and it is sometimes difficult to tell where the poetry begins or ends. The initial line and the final verse are metrically irregular in item (6). Its main body is organized into a metrical *run*. Lines 2–4 are regulated on three levels: the number of words per verse, the stress patterns of individual words, and the stress pattern of the whole verse. Every verse in the run consists of exactly two words and each word in each verse has a *trochaic* stress pattern, with a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. I notate this verse pattern as Sx/Sx, where S corresponds to a stressed syllable, x corresponds to an unstressed syllable, and the slash corresponds to the boundary between word feet. These are not simply two-stress verses. Any adequate description of the meter must specify the placement of word boundaries as well as the placement of stressed and unstressed syllables. Lines 1–3 in item (6) illustrate the most common placement of *alliteration* within the line, on the last word of the first verse and the first word of the second verse.

Verse patterns are defined by artistic repetition in regulated word-foot meters. Item (7) illustrates this kind of repetition.

- (7) *Greit ríg, rechtaid búada,*
 Ardor of a king, law-giver of pre-eminence,
barc bodbae, bruth brátha,
 ship of the war-goddess (= hero), heat of Doomsday,
bréo díglá, drech curad,
 flame of vengeance, face of a fighter,
cúinsiu chórad, críde ndracon.
 countenance of a champion, heart of a dragon.

The verses in lines 2–3 repeat the S/Sx pattern of a stressed monosyllable followed by a trochaic word.³¹ Once repetition establishes a verse pattern as a salient artistic structure, the poet may shift to a different pattern.

The poet shifts to the Sx/Sx pattern in line 4 for a minimal run of two verses. In item (7), [alliteration](#) goes beyond the basic requirements of the form. Here the last word in every verse alliterates with the first word of the next verse. Although I have formatted this excerpt in two-verse lines, on the model of item (6), the verses in item (7) form an unbroken chain.

Some poems in regulated word-foot meter employ a verse of three feet, as in item (8), the opening portion of *Amorgen's Incantation*.³² This text survives in an Old Irish manuscript but may have been composed in the Proto-Goidelic language of the ogham runic inscriptions.³³

- (8) *A[i]liu iath nhÉrenn: hérmac muir mothach,*
 I seek the land of Ireland: coursed be the fruitful sea,
mothach sliab srethach, srethach caill cíthach,
 fruitful the ranked highland, ranked the showery wood,
cíthach aub esscach, esscach loc lindmar,
 showery the river of cataracts, cataracts of a lake of pools,
lindmar tór típra, típra túa[i]th óenach,
 pools of the hill of a well, the well of a people of assemblies,
óenach ríg Temrach, Temair tór túathach,
 assemblies of the king of Tara, Tara, hill of peoples,
túatha Mac Miled, Miled long libern
 peoples of the Sons of Mil, Mil of ships, of barks.

Item (8) is a run of Sx/S/Sx verses with two trochaic words separated by a stressed monosyllable. The monosyllable usually alliterates with an adjacent trochaic word. This run also employs a traditional device called *conachlann* or *conchlann*, repetition of a verse-final word as the first word in the following verse. The pattern of repeated words in item (8) corresponds to the pattern of alliterating words in item (7). Poems employing *conachlann* allow substitution of alliterating words for repeated words to bind verses together, as in the first line of (8).³⁴ This equivalence between repeated words and alliterating words suggests that the word [foot](#) has an inherent link to [alliteration](#).

Item (9) illustrates employment of unstressed words as light word feet.³⁵

- (9) *Fo chen Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb augra!*
 Welcome, Labraid Swift-hand on Sword of Battle!
Urlam do rath, rurthech do chách,
 Prompt to grant favors, generous to all,
saigthech do chath, créchtach a thóeb,
 eager for combat, battle-scarred his side,
cundail a briathar, brigach a chert,
 faithful his word, forceful his justice,

carthach a (f)laith, laimthech a des,
 friendly his rule, daring his right hand,
diglach a gus, tinben laeochu,
 vengeful his vigor, he slays warriors,
Labraid fo chen!
 Labraid, welcome!

The first line is quite irregular and might be part of the prose saga in which the poem is embedded. There are two runs of verses with three feet each. Both runs use the same Sx/x/S pattern, which consists of an initial trochaic word, a medial unstressed monosyllable, and a final stressed monosyllable. The first run occupies lines 2–3. It is broken by *cundail a briathar*, which has an Sx/x/Sx pattern. Although this verse is not part of a run, it also has two stressed word feet with a light word *foot* in between. The following run of five verses returns to the Sx/x/S pattern. Item (9) employs a line of two verses linked by *alliteration* across the line-internal verse boundary. Irregularity in the fifth line is only apparent. Since its initial [f] is removed by lenition after the possessive pronoun, *(f)laith* alliterates with *laimthech*.³⁶ Absence of alliteration on the last word in lines 2–3 marks these *lines* as metrical units. Alliteration does occur at the ends of the following lines, however. Line-linking alliteration is a permissible option in poems that do not chain verses systematically.

Ancient Germanic Poetry

It would not be easy to compose an epic narrative in the Oscan meter of item (5) or the Irish meter of item (7). When most words in a poem must *alliterate*, those words must normally be stressed, and use of unstressed *function words* is severely limited. Without prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, or the verb *to be*, syntactic structures required for a viable narrative are impossibly difficult to construct. Composition in *regulated word-foot meter* adds the challenge of stress patterning. It is not surprising to find that poems employing this meter are lists with minimal syntactic structure or strings of tiny clauses with a bare verb or a verb and a noun. As we turn to Germanic meters, it is important to begin with similar material. Item (10) is a list of dwarfs' names in the thirteenth stanza of *Völuspá*, an Old Norse poem cited by Snorri Sturluson in his treatise on alliterative meters and Germanic mythology.³⁷ This poem is composed in *fornyrðislag*, the most archaic Norse meter.

- (10) *Fili, Kili, Fundinn, Náli,*
Hepti, Vili, Hánarr, Svíurr,
Frár, Hornbori, Frægr oc Lóni,
Aurvangr, Iari, Eikinscialdi

Except for *oc* ‘and’ in the sixth verse, item (10) consists entirely of proper names. Six of the eight verses have exactly two words. The verse type most frequently employed in this stanza is Sx/Sx, the metrical norm for Germanic meters, appropriately designated as type A₁ by Eduard Sievers.³⁸ In the first four verses, the Sx/Sx pattern is realized as two trochaic words. In the sixth verse, the first Sx foot is realized as a word group. This *variant* of type A₁ can be notated as S:x/Sx, where the colon represents a word boundary internal to the *foot*. In the last verse, the type A₁ pattern is realized as *Eikin-scialdi* ‘Oaken-shield,’ a compound proper name with two trochaic constituents.

2.7 Alliteration and the Word Foot

Stress can serve as a boundary marker for the word, facilitating analysis of a sentence into its constituents.³⁹ Such a *demarcative* function is performed more effectively by fixed initial stress than by the free accent inherited from Indo-European. In areas of language contact, initial stress aids cross-linguistic communication. Since ancient Celtic, Germanic, and Italic were still rather closely related, prominent marking of word boundaries would have made it easier to isolate informative cognates, helping adult learners acquire a second language for trade or intermarriage. The initial stress of these languages fell on the *root* syllable, emphasizing the semantic core of the word. In languages with initial stress, alliterating syllables would play an active role as the listener identified words in a metrical line. Highlighted by alliteration, initial stress provided an ideal linguistic basis for an inclusive inventory of word feet.⁴⁰ It is easy to imagine how the word foot might have spread along with initial stress and alliteration in the ancient west European contact area.

2.8 Word Order, Phrasal Stress, and Alliteration

The ancient Germanic *line* was divided into two verses linked by alliteration. Each verse had mandatory alliteration on the first syllable with metrically significant stress. In the first verse of the line (the *a-verse*), two alliterating syllables were permitted. In the second verse (the *b-verse*), this option was not available. Choice of alliteration as a regulated *sound echo* was conditioned by initial placement of *word stress*, an aspect of word-level phonology. Patterning of alliteration was conditioned by relative prominence among stressed words, an aspect of phrase-level phonology closely related to word order.

Word order in a variety of constructions can be predicted from the basic order of subject, verb, and object.⁴¹ The field devoted to comparative study of these constructions is called *language typology*. Uncontroversial basic orders are subject-verb-object (SVO), subject-object-verb (SOV), and verb-subject-object (VSO). These are the three language types with the subject normally placed before the object. Among modern languages, English is SVO, Japanese is SOV, and Gaelic is VSO. Latin, Sanskrit, and Homeric Greek had basic SOV order. In early Indo-European languages, case inflections distinguished subject nouns from direct and indirect object nouns. Departures from basic word order for rhetorical purposes were less likely to create ambiguity than in Modern English, which has lost most of its inflections.

Proto-Germanic was an SOV language with a functioning inflectional system. Direct evidence for SOV order comes from thirty-four runic sentences in a prehistoric northwest dialect. Of the thirty-four sentences, three are commands with the verb in sentence-initial position, the normal position for imperative verbs in an early Indo-European language. The other thirty-one instances are ordinary sentences in the indicative mood. Among these thirty-one, twenty-two (71 percent) have the verb in final position.⁴² The twenty-two instances include the first surviving *line* of Germanic alliterative poetry, a sentence of the Proto-Germanic type inscribed in runes on a golden drinking horn.⁴³

- (11) *ek HlewagastiR HoltijaR horna tawido*
 ‘I, Hlewagast, Holt’s son, made this horn.’

Item (11) divides into two verses at the major *syntactic break* between the subject (Hlewagast, Holt’s son) and the predicate (made the horn). Word order is SOV, with the past-tense verb *tawido* at the end of the sentence. An ancient Germanic verb marked for tense (in technical idiom, a *finite verb*) had weaker phrasal stress than nouns and adjectives and was accordingly less suitable for alliteration.⁴⁴ In item (11), alliteration falls on the prominently stressed syllables of the nouns (in boldface). When the meter was born, the alliterative pattern of the *line* matched the basic pattern of phrasal stress, in which the weakest stress was the last one. Within the sentence, the finite verb bore this weak final stress; in smaller phrases, other kinds of weakly stressed constituents stood last. In SVO languages like modern English, the last word of a phrase, clause, or sentence typically bears the most *prominent* “*nuclear*” stress.⁴⁵ If alliterating syllables took their traditional places in a modern translation of *Beowulf*, alliterative *line* patterns would seldom coincide with patterns of phrasal stress. Given the

universal link between alliteration and stress, having the nuclear stress just where alliteration is outlawed would seem persistently wrong. Alliterative meter would face serious challenges as English evolved from SOV to SVO.

Placement of Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs like *will*, *am*, and *have* govern main verbs and assign special forms to them in English. The main verb *go*, for example, is assigned infinitive form in *I will go*, present participle form in *I am going*, and past participle form in *I have gone*. As the Modern English examples show, typical SVO constructions have the governing auxiliary before the main verb. Typical SOV constructions have the governor after the main verb.⁴⁶

SOV phrases with auxiliaries occur in *Beowulf* and in Norse Eddic poetry.

- (12) (a) *þā þet hornreced healdan scoldon* (Beo 704)
 ‘who should hold that gabled hall’
 (b) *at þær mala scyldo* (*Grottasöngur*, 3/6)
 ‘that they should grind (meal)’

The constructions in item (12) are quite common in Northwest Germanic languages like Old English but less common in North Germanic languages like Old Norse, which began a shift to SVO significantly earlier. This shift is already evident in the small corpus of early Northern runic inscriptions, which have SVO order in ten of fourteen relevant examples (83 percent), as compared with less than 30 percent for the early Northwestern corpus.⁴⁷

Prepositions and Postpositions

Verbs are the heads of verb phrases and prepositions are the heads of prepositional phrases. Like verbs, prepositions govern objects and assign case to them. **I saw she* and **to she* are ungrammatical for the same reason, both having an object pronoun in subject case. Compare *I saw her* and *to her*, with the objects in the appropriate object case. When the verb regularly follows its object in a given language, other governors are likely to follow as well. Consistent SOV languages have postpositions rather than prepositions. Examples from non-Indo-European SOV languages are *dux-tur-rin patariw* ‘doctors to’ (Lezgian), *dene hé* ‘man with’ (Slave), and *mbanduwan mbi* ‘bow with’ (Siroi).⁴⁸ Postpositional phrases can still be found in Old English and Old Norse poems.

- (13) (a) *mancynne fram* ‘from mankind’ (Beo 110b)
 (b) *Scedelandum in* ‘in South Swedish lands’ (Beo 19b)
 (c) *Náströndo á* ‘at Nástrandr’ (*Völuspá*, 38/3)

Prepositions and postpositions fall within the more general category of *adpositions*.

Adpositional phrases are placed like verbal objects, normally appearing before the verb in SOV languages and after it in SVO languages.⁴⁹ The *Beowulf* poet often places the verb after prepositional and postpositional phrases.

- (14) (a) *þæt hīe him tō mihton*
gegnum gangan (Beo 313b–14a)
 ‘so that they might go to it (Hrothgar’s hall) together’
 (b) *þē hine æt frumsceaftē forð onsendon* (Beo 45)
 ‘who sent him forth at the beginning’

Items (14a–b) also illustrate archaic placement of *gegnum* ‘together’ and *forð* ‘forth.’ Such manner adverbs normally appear before the verb in SOV languages.⁵⁰ Compare the SVO constructions in the translations for these verses, which have the adverbs and adpositional phrases following the verb. Adverbs and adpositional phrases have similar modifying functions and can often be interchanged. In (14a), *him tō* ‘to it’ has the same meaning as *þær* ‘there.’ Item (14b) translates perfectly well as “who first sent him forth,” with an adverb replacing the prepositional phrase.

Placement of Adjectives

The order of adjective and noun does not correlate reliably with the order of verb and object. Apparent correlations in Eurasian languages have been disconfirmed by studies of languages outside Eurasia.⁵¹ Early Germanic languages employ adjective-noun order and noun-adjective order as well. Both orders are attested in *Beowulf*.

- (15) (a) *mǣrne þēoden* ‘famous prince’ (Beo 201a)
 (b) *þēoden mǣrne* (Beo 353a)

The noun-adjective order of (15b) is no longer productive in Modern English. Retaining this order as an option allowed an Old English poet to choose either the adjective or the noun as the mandatory alliterating word.

Some languages allow adjectives and nouns to serve as predicates without a *linking verb*. African American Vernacular English makes systematic

use of sentences like *Mary angry* and *Mary a doctor*. Latin omits its *to be* verb in similar constructions. In standard written English, the corresponding predicate adjective construction would be *Mary is angry* and the corresponding predicate nominative construction would be *Mary is a doctor*. A form of the verb *to be* is called a *copula* when used with a noun or adjective to form a predicate. The order of copula and predicate noun or adjective follows the order of verb and object. Poets used the older or newer order for the required alliteration, as shown in (16a–e).

- (16) (a) *Dēað bið sēlla* ‘Death is better’ (Beo 2890b)
 (b) *Sēlre bið æghwæm* ‘It is better for everyone’ (Beo 1384b)
 (c) *þæt is sōð metod* ‘That is the true god’ (Beo 1611b)
 (d) *Wundor is tō secganne* ‘It is a marvel to relate’ (Beo 1724b)
 (e) *dēad is Æschere* ‘Æschere is dead’ (Beo 1323b)
 (f) *tōt ist Hiltibrant* ‘Hildebrand is dead’ (*Hildebrandslied*, 44a)
 (g) *Mæl is mē tō fēran* ‘It is time for me to go’ (Beo 316a)

When it stands before the copula in early Germanic languages, a predicate noun or adjective has a subordinate phrasal stress that can be treated as metrically stressed or as metrically unstressed by the poet.⁵² In (16e), the subordinate stress is interpreted as the first metrical stress and takes the alliteration. In (16f), a verse from an Old High German poem, the predicate adjective is passed over and alliterating *Hilt-* counts as the first metrical stress. In (16g), the predicate noun *mæl* is passed over and *fēr-* counts as the first metrical stress. The adjective-copula order of (16e–f) survives today in the literary register, for example in *Tender is the Night*, a poetic phrase appropriated as a book title.

Placement of Articles, Demonstratives, and Other Determiners

Articles like *the* and demonstratives like *this* precede the noun in SVO languages. In SOV languages like proto-Germanic, they follow the noun.⁵³ The phrase *halli hinō* ‘stone this’ is an example from the oldest Northwest Germanic inscriptions. Other examples from this small corpus include *magōz mīnas* ‘of son my’ and *Wōduridē Witandablaiban* ‘Wōdurīdaz Lord’ (noun + title).⁵⁴ These word orders survive in verses like (17a–c).

- (17) (a) *grund-wong þone* ‘the sea-floor’ (Beo 2588a)
 (b) *māgas þāra* ‘their kinsmen’ (Beo 1015b)
 (c) *Hiorogār cyning* ‘King Heorogar’ (Beo 2158b)

Proto-Germanic syntax places the alliterating word as required in these verses. Item (17c) would be unacceptable with modern word order even if

cyning alliterated. At the beginning of the verse, *cyning* would undergo obligatory **resolution** of its two short syllables into one long syllable and the verse would fall below the minimum of four **metrical syllables**. At the end of the verse, on the other hand, the last syllable in *cyning* may stand unresolved to fill a fourth metrical position. In citations of Old English verses, resolved syllables will be underlined as in (17c), where *Hioro* counts as one long stressed syllable.

Ordering of Genitive Nouns and the Nouns they Modify

In Modern English, which marks the genitive with a case inflection or with the preposition *of*, we can say *John's book*, with the genitive noun first, or *the edge of the razor*, with the genitive noun last. Ordering is not entirely free in these constructions. *The book of John* would probably be understood as part of the New Testament and *the razor's edge* as a book title. English has eliminated most of the Proto-Germanic inflectional endings. Genitive inflections now appear primarily on animate nouns representing human possessors. In SOV languages, inanimate genitives tend to precede the noun they modify.⁵⁵ Proto-Germanic had a contrasting position for animate genitives, which normally followed the modified noun.⁵⁶ As in other respects, the archaic order is the opposite of our modern order, which normally places an animate genitive before the modified noun and an inanimate genitive after it. In Proto-Germanic, genitives were marked by inflectional endings and *of* was restricted to use as a preposition meaning *from*. In the era of *Beowulf*, modern genitive *of* had not yet developed, but both word orders were employed and either noun could be positioned to alliterate, as shown in (18).

- (18) (a) *sunu* *Healfdenes* 'Halfdene's son' (Beo 268a)
 (b) *Healfdenes* *sunu* (Beo 1009b)
 (c) *mēces* *ecge* 'the sword's edges' (Beo 1812a)
 (d) *oððe* *gripe* *mēces* 'or the bite of the sword' (Beo 1765a)

Comparative Constructions

Sentences like *Jill is taller than Frances* have the expected order for SVO languages, with the comparative adjective (*taller*) followed by the marker of comparison (*than*) and the standard of comparison (*Frances*). In SOV languages, the order is standard-marker-adjective.

- (19) (a) *müküda-laj žizwi ask'an-zawa* (Lezgian)
 'other-than somewhat shorter' = somewhat shorter than the other

- (b) *Bip þas hlēoðres swēg*
 The sound of that voice is
eallum songcraeftum swētra ond wlitigra
 sweeter and more splendid than all musical compositions
ond wynsumra wrenca gehwilcum
 and more delightful than each one of melodies (Phoenix, 1131b–33b)
- (c) *Sē was betera ðonne ic* ‘He was better than I’ (Beo 469b)

Item (19a) is an example from a non-Indo-European language.⁵⁷ In the Old English comparative constructions of (19b), the marker function of Lezgian *-laj* is performed by the Old English dative inflection *-um*. Old English *songcraeftum swētra* has the same archaic SOV order. The phrase *wynsumra . . . gehwilcum* ‘more delightful than each’ has the comparative adjective in its modern position but archaic order of the marker and standard. Old English poets also used SVO constructions with *ðonne*, ancestor of Modern English *than*, as illustrated in (19c).⁵⁸

2.9 Alliterative Patterns and Patterns of Phrasal Stress

Governed words have more prominent phrasal stress than their governors. High-frequency governors like articles and adpositions are normally unstressed. Finite verbs can have significant stress but are normally less prominent than their governed objects. As a result, SOV constructions have a strong-weak stress contour. In the earliest alliterative poetry, a verse was typically realized as a phrase with SOV syntax. In such a verse the ideal candidate for alliteration was the first stressed constituent, which had the most prominent phrasal stress. At the level of the *line*, the rules for alliterative patterning needed to integrate more than two stressed words and did so with a metrical equivalent of SOV phrasal stress:

When two stressed constituents occupy the same metrical domain, the first constituent subordinates the second.

Item (20) illustrates application of this *metrical subordination* rule in a typical line with two metrical stresses in each verse. The *strong positions* are notated as usual with a capital *S* and the irrelevant weak positions are omitted.

- (20) (a) *[ber]an ofer [bolc]an [beorht]e [rand]as* (Beo 231)
 [[S]_{stronger} [S]_{weaker}]_{stronger} [[S]_{stronger} [S]_{weaker}]_{weaker}]
 ‘to bear bright shields over the gangplank’
- (b) *[lic]es [feor]me [leng] [sorg]ian* (Beo 451)
 [[S]_{stronger} [S]_{weaker}]_{stronger} [[S]_{stronger} [S]_{weaker}]_{weaker}]
 ‘to be concerned for very long with nourishment of my body’

Stressed syllables bracketed in the linguistic material are matched to idealized [S] positions of the metrical pattern. Within each verse, the first [S] is stronger than the second. Since the *a-verse* and *b-verse* occupy the same metrical domain (the line), the *a-verse* is stronger than the *b-verse*. Alliteration is obligatory on the strongest [S] position of each verse. As (20a) shows, alliteration is permissible on the weaker [S] position of the stronger verse, though not required. Compare (20b), with single alliteration in the stronger *a-verse*. The weaker [S] position of the weaker *b-verse* must not alliterate. The stress contour for a typical line is 1-3-2-4, where 1 is highest and 4 is lowest.⁵⁹

2.10 Historical Origins of Poetic Word Orders

The SOV word orders in *Beowulf* were not free creations of an individual genius. Constructions like *postpositional* phrases were *syntactic archaisms* preserved by formulaic tradition. The frequency of SOV archaisms declined as the inflectional system decayed and SVO order became more and more firmly established (section 4.11). In Shakespeare's time we no longer find constructions like *sea-bottom the*. We should probably regard poetic word orders as archaisms until the era of modern linguistics, when polyglots like Ezra Pound began to imitate languages typologically different from Modern English. If English poets were creating their own word orders before Pound's time, it would be hard to explain why they neglected the most rudimentary VSO sentence pattern. It is easy enough to construct VSO declarative sentences like *Writes Chaucer poetry*, but such sentences are rare even in experimental poems.

In early English, VSO was a secondary order restricted to questions and commands. The auxiliary verb still stands before the subject in questions but the main verb now stands between subject and object (*Does Chaucer write poetry?*). Commands are now verb-initial only when the subject is omitted. Their SVO structure becomes clear in emphatic commands like *You clean your room right now!* English poets have neglected VSO syntax because it has played no perceptible role in the evolution of the language. SOV syntax has left conspicuous traces in Modern English, however, for example in the order of compound elements, which has remained largely unchanged since Proto-Germanic. OV compounds like *nit-picker* are still the rule and VO compounds like *pickpocket* are infrequent exceptions.

2.II Summary

Fixed stress on the first syllable of the word created ideal conditions for alliterative word-foot meters in ancient Celtic, Italic, and Germanic languages. The predominant metrical importance of the word is obvious in Italic and Celtic *lines* that have a specified number of words but no specified rhythm or syllable count. In *regulated word-foot meters*, an Irish word with any phonological pattern can be employed as a metrical foot and the verse pattern, highlighted by repetition, is an ordered array of word-foot patterns. The Germanic alliterative verse is a natural syntactic constituent with two word feet. The *alliterative* pattern of the verse follows the contour of a typical Proto-Germanic phrase, with obligatory alliteration on the first and most *prominent* stress. The alliterative pattern of the line follows the contour of a typical Proto-Germanic sentence, with *alliteration* systematically absent on a weak final stress. Given the universal link between stress and alliteration, alliterative lines provide valuable information about patterns of phrasal stress in the prehistoric era when the meter was born. Evidence for SOV order in the earliest runic inscriptions is validated by rules for alliteration in the earliest Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon, and Old High German meters. Syntactic archaisms that facilitate composition in these meters provide a third kind of independent evidence for SOV as the basic order of Proto-Germanic. Conformity of the line pattern to a typical SOV sentence pattern provides additional support for a *universalist* theory that represents *lines* as idealized sentences (*section 1.18*).

Old English Meter in the Era of Beowulf

3.1 Norms for the Metrical Position, the Foot, and the Line

Like the Irish poets surveyed in [section 2.6](#), the *Beowulf* poet employs foot patterns based on native word patterns. All Old English word patterns qualify as **foot** patterns. There are trochaic Sx feet with the pattern of words like *dryhten* ‘lord,’ **dactylic** Sxx feet with the pattern of words like *béaldode* ‘encouraged,’ and S feet with the pattern of stressed monosyllables like *gōd* ‘good.’ There are light x feet with the pattern of unstressed monosyllables like *ond* ‘and’ and light xx feet with the pattern of unstressed disyllables like *oppe* ‘or.’ Finally, there are heavy feet corresponding to compounds and derivatives with a syllable of primary stress (notated by a capital S) and a syllable of subordinate stress (notated by a lower-case s). Heavy feet correspond to words like *fēoh-gift* ‘treasure-gift’ (Ss), *sórhfulne* ‘sorrowful’ (Ssx), *middan-gæard* ‘middle-earth’ (Sxs), and *sibbe-gedryht* ‘kindred band’ (Sxxs). The nine Old English foot patterns provide the building blocks for verses. Within the word-foot theory employed here, an Old English verse pattern is simply a pair of foot patterns.¹ Some constraints on the ordering of feet are required to highlight the basic two-foot structure of the verse ([section 3.3](#)).

Within the classification system of Eduard Sievers, Old English verse patterns are called *verse types*.² The higher-level Sievers types are labelled A, B, C, D, and E. Within each type there are subtypes with unique metrical characteristics. Type A, for example, is subdivided into type A₁, type A_{2a}, type A_{2b}, type A_{2ab}, and type A₃. The five-types system has provided a common reference point for students of Old English meter. I will adopt Sievers’s labels for verse types in this book. Use of traditional labels is workable because most of my word-foot patterns correspond to a Sievers type or subtype. A few new subtypes will be introduced in this chapter.

Although the word-foot theory accepts traditional classifications as legitimate, it goes on to explain why some Old English phrases qualify as

verses while others of similar length are ruled out. Within the five-types system, there are few general principles that apply in the same way to all types. Sievers's constraints are typically valid for only one type or subtype. Within the word-foot theory, all constraints are formulated as general principles that apply across the board.³

Iambic pentameter repeats an iambic foot pattern to create a fixed, predictable line pattern. Poets like Shakespeare seek variety through controlled departure from one basic pattern. Old English poets employ a variety of two-foot patterns and shift unpredictably from one pattern to another. Departures permissible in iambic pentameter would destroy any sense of metrical coherence in *Beowulf*. Shakespeare can place an unstressed syllable on an **S position**. Such **stress mismatches** are **ruled out categorically** in *Beowulf*. Shakespeare allows the foot boundary to split trochaic words. In *Beowulf*, such **bracketing mismatches** are unacceptable. **Foot** boundaries must be aligned with word boundaries, where the intuitive concept of *word boundary* includes the internal boundary of a compound and the boundary between an unstressed prefix and a stressed root syllable.⁴

Some mismatches had to be tolerated in a meter used for narrative epic. The Old English system permitted **realization** of the **foot** as a word group. Unstressed inflectional syllables always occupied **weak positions** in basic patterns, but unstressed **function words** could be added under certain conditions as **extrametrical** syllables. Unstressed prefixes were equivalent to unstressed function words in Old English and could also be added to basic patterns.⁵ Such departures from **optimal** form were carefully managed. As we survey the verse types, it will be convenient to have a list of important norms. Norms **N1–9** apply **universal** principles of verse construction to poetry composed in Old English, a descendant of Proto-Germanic (compare **P1–5**, **section 1.18**). Archaic features of the parent language still played important roles in the meter of *Beowulf*.

- N1.** An optimal **line** has the SOV syntax of a Proto-Germanic sentence, with **prominent** words such as nouns and adjectives followed by a weakly stressed finite verb. The verb normally appears in a line-final location where it must not **alliterate**.
- N2.** An optimal verse has the syntax of a Proto-Germanic phrase, with the most prominent stressed word preceding any stressed word of lesser prominence.⁶
- N3.** An optimal verse has two primary **word stresses** (and no other stresses).

- N4. A **foot** is normally realized as a single word.
- N5. The optimal **foot** pattern corresponds to the word pattern of highest frequency, which has a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. The **complexity** added by a non-optimal **foot** depends on the frequency of the corresponding word pattern.
- N6. A **metrical position** is normally occupied by one syllable.
- N7. All syllables of stressed words occupy **metrical positions**, including any unstressed syllables such as inflectional endings.⁷ Unstressed **function words** (which include unstressed prefixes) normally occupy **metrical positions**. Under certain conditions, however, they may stand outside the metrical pattern as extrametrical syllables.
- N8. **Extrametrical syllables**, which do not occupy **metrical positions**, are most acceptable in types A3, B, and C, where they accompany a light x or xx **foot** before the first alliteration. In other verse types, extrametrical syllables do not normally appear before the first alliteration, where they could be confused with a light foot in type A3, B, or C.⁸
- N9. The structure of complex a-verses is normally clarified by use of demarcative **alliteration** on the **S position** of the second foot.

N1–9 can be thought of as violable rules that permit exceptions at a cost in **complexity**.⁹

The **principle of closure** makes it possible to identify metrical norms by their enhanced presence in the b-verse. In some cases, however, metrical norms conflict and we need to determine which norm exerts the strongest influence on verse placement. We begin by considering representative examples of conflict in a few Old English verse types. The proportion of a-verses to b-verses in *Beowulf* is given to the right of the verse type in the cited examples.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|--------|
| (1) | (a) <i>georne / hȳrdon</i> (66a) | Sx/Sx (type A1) | 16:101 |
| | ‘eagerly obeyed’ | | |
| | (b) <i>bēagas / dēalde</i> (80b) | Sx/Sx (type A1) | |
| | ‘distributed rings’ | | |
| | (c) <i>(for)gyteð ond / (for)gȳmeð</i> (1751a) | (x)S:x/(x)Sx (type A1) | 1:0 |
| | ‘forgets and neglects’ | | |

Variants (1a) and (1b) share many optimal features. In both, the weakly stressed verb follows a more prominent word that bears the alliteration (N2) and there are two primary word stresses (N3). Each foot is realized as a single word (N4) and has an Sx pattern corresponding to the most common Old English word pattern (N5). Each metrical position is realized as a single syllable (N6). There are no extrametrical syllables (N7). These optimal

features make a second alliteration unnecessary (N9). Although (1a) is not particularly complex, its placement makes it more complex than (1b), which realizes the optimal prominence contour within its line and has its weakly stressed finite verb in a line-final position where alliteration must not occur (N1). Verses like (1a–b) appear most often at the end of the line, with 101 instances in the b-verse and only 16 in the a-verse. Item (1c), the only verse of its kind in *Beowulf*, has many complex features. The first foot is realized as a word group (notated as S:x) rather than as a single word. The short stressed syllable of *-gyteð* undergoes obligatory resolution and shares its S position with the following unstressed syllable, violating N6. N7 is violated twice by an unstressed extrametrical syllable (parenthesized). The extrametrical syllable at the beginning of the verse also violates N8. Although (1c) ends with a finite verb, the additive effect of its complex features draws it to the a-verse, where a second alliteration clarifies metrical structure (N9).

Resolution was eliminated by sound change after the Old English period and played no significant role in the evolution of Middle English meter. Here it will suffice to observe that a short stressed vowel on the first S position of an Old English verse must be resolved with a following unstressed vowel. The two resolved vowels are metrically equivalent to one long stressed vowel. Resolved vowels will be underlined as in (1c) to show that they occupy the same metrical position.

Item (2a) is a two-word type C verse consisting of an unstressed word and a compound.

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| (2) | (a) <i>on / bēor-sele</i> (492a)
'in the beer-hall' | x/Ssx (type C) 50:20 |
| | (b) <i>on / wang stigon</i> (225b)
'disembarked onto the shore' | x/Ssx (type C) 3:11 |

The first foot in type C is light and the second foot has an Ssx pattern that still occurs in compounds like *nīt-pīcker* and *bēer-bārrel*. Item (2a) realizes each metrical position as one syllable and each foot as a single word. In these respects it is optimal. It has only one primary word stress, however, violating N3. The Ssx pattern is the most common one for Old English compound nouns and adjectives, but finite verbs with an Ssx pattern are extremely uncommon in poetry. Type C verses rarely end with an Ssx finite verb.¹⁰ Item (2b) realizes the second foot as a word group and is more complex in that respect than (2a). Unlike (2a), however, (2b) ends with a finite verb in a non-alliterating position. Its conformity to N1 attracts it to the b-verse. When linear norm N1 conflicts with foot norm N5, N1 exerts stronger influence.

Items (3a–b) are two-word type E verses consisting of an Ssx compound and a finite verb, with one syllable on each metrical position.

- (3) (a) *Gūðbyrne / scān* (321b) Ssx/S (type E) 5:45
 ‘the war-corslet shone’
 (b) *bānhringas / bræc* (1567a) Ssx/S (type E)
 ‘broke the vertebrae’

Monosyllabic finite verbs are common in Old English and their optimal placement is at the end of a type E b-verse like item (3a). N1 works together with N4 in such verses and enhances their relative frequency in the b-verse to 90 percent (45/50). Type E does not employ the optimal foot pattern and is more complex in that respect than type A1. When type E stands in the a-verse, its complexity is often mitigated by placement of demarcative alliteration on the S position of the second foot (N9). The a-verses like item (3b) all have double alliteration.

When norms conflict, the norm applying at the highest level usually exerts the strongest influence on verse placement. All other things being equal, a line-level norm like N1 exerts more influence than a verse-level norm like N3, which in turn exerts more influence than a foot-level norm like N4.¹¹ In extreme cases like item (1c), multiple violations at lower levels can exert more influence than a line-level norm.

A major innovation in Middle English alliterative poetry was to restrict most verse types to the opening or closing half of the line. Pre-existing tendencies provided the starting point for this innovation. Explaining how N1–9 affect verse placement in the whole range of metrical variants would take us beyond the scope of this book and would be interesting primarily to Old English specialists.¹² Here we will be concerned with Old English tendencies that evolved into Middle English rules. We will also take note of features that made a verse type vulnerable to language changes and could lead to diminished frequency or extinction. Relevant changes include an increase in the frequency of function words and the decline of compounding as a productive process.¹³

3.2 Evidence for a Two-Word Verse Norm

Although explicit formulation of metrical rules can be difficult, it is easy to see that two-word phrases had special value for Old English poets. The two-word norm strikes the eye at once when we compare item (4), the concluding lines of *Beowulf*, with item (5), the concluding lines of Ælfric’s narrative about a Christian warrior-king, Saint Oswald. Ælfric lived during the late Old English period and the alliterative form he invented shows the influence of recent language changes.¹⁴

- (4) *Swā begnornodon Gēata lēode
hlāfordes hryre, heorðgenēatas;
cwædon þæt hē wære wyruldcyninga
manna mildust ond monðwærust,
lēodum liðost ond lofgeornost.*

Thus (the) people (of the) Geats, (his) hearth-companions, mourned (the) fall (of their) lord; (they) said that he was (the) friendliest (of) men, (of) worldly kings, and (the most) humanly kind; (most) gracious (to his) people and (most) eager (for) fame.

In the *Beowulf* passage, the only conspicuous departure from the two-word norm is *cwædon þæt hē wære*. This verse is of type A3, the type most tolerant of extrametrical words (section 3.12). Compounded words count as separate word feet in *heorð-genēatas* ‘hearth companions’ and *wyruld-cyninga* ‘worldly kings’ (genitive plural). There is a simple rule for the number of word feet in a compound: Compounds with the stress contour of a whole verse count as two feet and smaller compounds count as one foot. In the last two b-verses, unstressed *ond* ‘and’ counts as a light first foot and a trisyllabic compound counts as the second foot. The compact word-foot style of *Beowulf* was achieved with the help of grammatical inflections, which could still do the work of Modern English function words (parenthesized in the translation).

Ælfric employs verse phrases linked by alliteration but does not employ word feet. In item (5), the only two-word verse is *intō Glēawceastre* ‘into Gloucester.’

- (5) *Þas hālgan Ōswaldes bān wurdon eft gebrōht
æfter mænegum gēarum tō Myrcena lande
intō Glēawceastre, ond God þær geswutelode
oft fela wundra þurh þone hālgan wer.
Sȳ þas wuldor þām Ælmihtigan ā tō worulde.*

The holy Oswald’s bones were brought back after many years to the Mercians’ land, into Gloucester, and there God often manifested many wonders through that holy man. (For) that be glory to the Almighty forever unto eternity.

Ælfric depends very little on inflectional endings in this passage, which translates into modern English with only one parenthesized addition: ‘for,’ rendering an archaic function of genitive *þas*. The contrasts between (4) and (5) are maintained throughout the two heroic narratives.¹⁵ In the 287 lines of Ælfric’s narrative there are no verses like *manna mildust* or *lēodum liðost*, optimal realizations of the Sx/Sx pattern with two trochaic words. In the first 287 lines of *Beowulf* there are 80 such verses. Two-word realizations of

types A2, D, and E appear more than 50 times in the first 287 lines of *Beowulf* but are not to be found in Ælfric's narrative.

3.3 Combinations of Feet that are Not Acceptable as Verse Types

Old English meter allows the widest possible variety of **foot** pairings, ruling out only those that would make scansion impossibly difficult during real-time performance. One important constraint on foot pairing compensates for the freedom to realize a foot as a word group. In item (2b), repeated for convenience as (6a), the word group *wang stigon* realizes an Ssx foot in a type C verse. Permitting verses like (6a) makes it necessary to rule out the verse pattern represented by (6b), which *overlaps* the second foot of (6a).

- (6) (a) *on / wang stigon* (225b) x/Ssx (type C)
 (b) **wang / stigon* *S/Sx (starred as unmetrical)

If the inventory of verse types included S/Sx, *wang stigon* could be interpreted as one foot or as two, and the two-foot structure of (6a) could not be apprehended at the speed of performance. For the same reason, use of the foot pattern Ss rules out a verse type *S/S and the foot pattern Sxs rules out *Sx/S. These constraints on metrical ambiguity rule out all verse types with fewer than four metrical positions and some four-position types are ruled out as well. Use of the foot pattern Sxxs rules out a verse type *Sxx/S. Other four-position types are ruled out by the requirement that foot patterns must correspond to word patterns. Old English has no sS words like Modern English *fifteen* and no sxS words like *sèventéen*, so there can be no verse patterns like *sS/Sx or *S/sxS. Apart from stressed monosyllables with unstressed prefixes, which count as two words in *Beowulf*, there are no xS or xxS words in Old English; and there are no unstressed words in Old English with more than two syllables. Four-position patterns like *xxx/S, *xx/xS, and *x/xxS are accordingly ruled out.

The only compound feet placed at the beginning of the verse are Ss and Ssx, which correspond to the compound word patterns of highest frequency.

- (7) (a) **ellenrōf / eorl* *Sxs/S, cf. *eorl / ellenrōf* (3063a)
 'valor-bold earl'
 (b) **sēmēpe / setton* *Ssx/Sx, cf. *setton / sēmēpe* (325a)
 'sea-weary, they set down (their shields)'
 (c) **tryddodon / tīrfæste* *Sxx/Ssx, cf. *tryddode / tīrfæst* (922a)
 'they advanced secure in glory'

Feet of the form Sxs and Sxxs correspond to word patterns of lower frequency and must stand in second position. Item (7a) would be

Table 3.1 *Verse Types Reliably Attested in Beowulf*

Second Foot →	S	Sx	Ss	Sxx	Ssx	Sxs	Sxxs
First Foot							
↓							
x				[X]	X	X	X
S				X	X	X	X
xx		[X]	[X]	[X]	X	X	X
Sx		X	X	X	X	X	X
Ss		[X]	[X]				
Sxx		X	X				
Ssx	[X]						

acceptable only with the order of feet reversed, as in *Beowulf* 3063a. When a compound foot stands first, the verse must not exceed the optimal length of four metrical positions. Item (7b) violates this constraint but would be acceptable with its feet in the opposite order. Only one foot per verse may exceed the optimal foot length of two syllables. The plural inflection *-e* of *tīrfæste* renders (7c) unacceptable. A change from plural to singular yields *Beowulf* 922a, which has only one long foot.

Table 3.1 displays the verse types employed by the *Beowulf* poet. An *X* indicates that the foot pattern to the left can be followed by the foot pattern above to create an acceptable Old English verse type. Bracketing of *X* indicates that the type is very rare or absent in Middle English alliterative poetry. As we shall see in Chapters 5–9, some Middle English verse types required addition of unstressed syllables to the basic Old English patterns and some *s* positions were redefined as Middle English *S* positions.

3.4 Types A1 (Sx/Sx) and A1x (Sxx/Sx)

Although any Old English word can serve as a foot, the metrical complexity of a foot pattern depends on the frequency of the corresponding word pattern (N5). The optimal foot pattern, *Sx*, corresponds to the optimal Old English word pattern, the pattern of words with a root syllable bearing primary stress followed by an unstressed grammatical ending.¹⁶ Type A1, with the optimal pattern in each foot, has the highest frequency in *Beowulf*, with a total of about 2,000 instances in about 6,200 verses (32 percent).¹⁷ Type A1 has the freest placement within the line and the greatest tolerance

for mismatches. This optimal type establishes a verse norm of four metrical positions and two primary word stresses. Although trochaic words were common in Old English, phrases consisting of two trochaic words had a low natural frequency in prose. Prose phrases usually contained one or more unstressed function words.¹⁸ It required effort to achieve a high frequency of two-word realizations in type A1. Two-word realizations account for 44 percent of type A1 verses in *Beowulf* (903/2,034). An additional 127 verses are realized as compounds with two Sx constituents.¹⁹

As the optimal realization of the optimal verse pattern, two-word type A1 has no inherent complexity. In accord with the principle of closure, this realization favors the second half of the line, with 514 b-verses (57 percent), as compared with 389 a-verses (43 percent). Of the 389 a-verses, 122 have double alliteration (31 percent). Double alliteration occurs in only 3 of 75 a-verses realized as compounds with two Sx constituents (4 percent). A second alliteration is more difficult to obtain in compounds because requirements for compound formation are more restrictive than requirements for construction of phrases.

The first foot of type A1 can be realized as an S:x word group at a cost in complexity, which inhibits placement in the b-verse (N4). Consider item (8a), which has the same stress pattern as two-word type A1 and ends with a prominent word. The verse counts to the right are for all comparable instances with a noun or adjective in final position.

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (8) | (a) <i>grim ond / grædig</i> (121a) | S:x/Sx (112:24) |
| | ‘grim and greedy’ | |
| | (b) <i>lange / hwile</i> (16a) | Sx/Sx (389:514) |
| | ‘a long time’ | |
| | (c) <i>forð on-/sendon</i> (45b) | S:x-/Sx (11:65) |
| | ‘sent forth’ | |
| | (d) <i>lād ge-/widru</i> (1375a) | S:x-/Sx (1:0) |
| | ‘loathsome storms’ | |

Variants like (8a) are usually a-verses and the leftward boundary of the second foot is usually marked with a second alliterating syllable, in accord with N9. Alliteration serves this demarcative purpose in 98 percent of the 112 a-verses like (8a), with only two instances of single alliteration. Double alliteration occurs in only 31 percent of the a-verses like (8b), with 122 instances out of 389. Aids to scansion are less urgently required in these two-word variants because of their metrical simplicity, which creates an attraction to the b-verse. In the variants like (8c), the constituent on the x position of the first foot is an unstressed prefix attached to a finite verb.

These variants are attracted to the b-verse, where the finite verb can take its optimal place at the end of the line. Item (8d), the only comparable instance with a prefixed noun, is situated in the a-verse, as expected.

In type A1, unstressed extrametrical words and prefixes can appear before either foot. These syllables are parenthesized in the Old English examples and in notations for the corresponding metrical patterns.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|----------------|
| (9) | (a) | (ge-)sæt on / sesse (Beo 2717a) | (x)S:x/Sx |
| | | ‘sat on the seat’ | |
| | (b) | (Ne) hēdde / (hē þæs) heafolan (Beo 2697a) | (x)Sx/(xx)Sx |
| | | ‘he heeded not the (dragon’s) head’ | |
| | (c) | (wið) ord ond / (wið) ecge (Beo 1549a) | (x)S:x/(x)Sx |
| | | ‘against spear and against sword’ | |
| | (d) | (Ofer-)fōr hē / (mid þȳ) folce (Ex 56a) | (xx)S:x/(xx)Sx |
| | | ‘he fared over with the people’ | |
| | (e) | (ne ge-)feah hē / (þēre) fēhbōe (Beo 109a) | (xx)S:x/(xx)Sx |
| | | ‘he did not delight in that feud’ | |
| | (f) | (gē at) hām gē / (on) herge (Beo 1248a) | (xx)S:x/(x)Sx |
| | | ‘both at home and in the army’ | |

Extrametrical material before the first foot, distinguished by the term *anacrusis*, is restricted in frequency and managed with special care. Anacrusis also occurs in type D and in one A2 subtype (Sx/Ss). Among more than 6,000 verses in *Beowulf*, no more than 80 have monosyllabic anacrusis and only 9 have disyllabic anacrusis. Anacrusis is normally realized with prefixes and prefixal negative particles, constituents of very low prominence closely bound to the following stressed word.²⁰ Item (9a) is typical. Item (9b) has a prefixal negative particle in anacrusis and two extrametrical syllables before the second foot. Substitution of a non-prefixal word for a prefix is less common but not ruled out, as a few verses like (9c) show. Prefixes with two syllables can appear before the first foot, as in (9d). In (9e), disyllabic anacrusis is realized as two prefixal words. Item (9f) realizes disyllabic anacrusis as two non-prefixal words.

As we trace the evolution of Old English verse types, we will need a special term for a sequence of two or more unstressed syllables. For continuity with the following chapters I adopt the term *long dip*. A-verses like (9f), with two long dips, would flourish in the late Middle English period, when grammatical inflections had been obscured or eliminated and their functions had been taken over by unstressed words. For the strong positions of alliterative meter I use the term *lift* throughout, distinguishing *primary lifts* (S positions) from *secondary lifts* (s positions).

In Old English poetry, any prefixed verb can appear at the beginning of a sentence, which normally corresponds to the beginning of a *line*. The beginning of the sentence was the normal position for verbs in some Proto-Germanic sentence types. In a line realized as a Proto-Germanic question or command, a prefixed verb would stand at the beginning of the a-verse and its extrametrical prefix would occupy the ideal location for a complex metrical feature, as distant as possible from the strictly regulated closure. *Anacrusis* could be sustained as a traditional option because it was least inappropriate where it was most often needed.

The *Beowulf* poet avoids *anacrusis* when alternative word orders are permitted by the metrical rules.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|-----------|
| (10) | (a) | *(<i>ge-</i>) <i>gyrwed</i> / <i>golde</i>
'adorned with gold' | (x)Sx/Sx |
| | (b) | <i>golde</i> / (<i>ge-</i>) <i>gyrwed</i> (553a) | Sx/(x)Sx |
| | (c) | *(<i>ofer-</i>) <i>sāwon</i> / <i>selfe</i>
'they looked on themselves' | (xx)Sx/Sx |
| | (d) | <i>selfe</i> / (<i>ofer-</i>) <i>sāwon</i> (419a; cf. 684a, 845a, 2686a) | Sx/(xx)Sx |

There are no A1 variants like (10a), with a prefixed trochaic word at the beginning of the verse.²¹ Such variants do not occur because a change in word order can eliminate the anacrusis. In (10b), the *Beowulf* poet places the *extrametrical* prefix in the less heavily restricted location in the middle of the verse, where the prefix cannot be confused with a light first foot. Items (10c) and (10d) illustrate avoidance of disyllabic anacrusis.

As a departure from the metrical norm, *anacrusis* affects placement of a verse within the line. In the b-verse, only monosyllabic anacrusis is permitted and the frequency of anacrusis is even lower than in the a-verse. There are only 7 b-verse instances in *Beowulf*.²² The b-verses with anacrusis are all of type A1, the type most tolerant of metrical *complexity*.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|------------|
| (11) | (a) | (<i>ðurb-</i>) <i>fōn ne</i> / <i>mihte</i> (1504b) | (x)S:x/Sx |
| | | 'could not pierce' | |
| | (b) | (<i>swā</i>) <i>sāe be-lbūgeð</i> (1223b) | (x)S:x-/Sx |
| | | 'as the sea encompasses' | |

The prefixed infinitive verb in (11a) stands after its direct object and its governing auxiliary takes clause-final position, the normal position for auxiliary verbs in Proto-Germanic. Several b-verses with anacrusis are like item (11b), with a non-prefixal word in anacrusis. The strong bias toward prefixal *anacrusis* in the a-verse is not evident in the b-verse.

Type A1 variants with the first foot realized as a word often have an *extrametrical* syllable before the second foot, usually a prefix. In 70 such

variants, the second Sx foot contains a constituent that is not a verb, as in item (12a). An extrametrical prefix before the second foot causes less complexity than employment of a word group in the first foot of variants like item (8a), repeated as (12b).

- (12) (a) *mūērða / (ge)myndig* (1530a) Sx/(x)Sx (38:32)
 ‘mindful of glory’
 (b) *grim ond / grēdig* (121a) S:x/Sx (112:24)
 (c) *geōmrode / giddum* (1118a) Sxx/Sx (7:5)
 ‘lamented in songs’

Variants like (12a) are almost evenly distributed within the line. Variants like (12b) are strongly attracted to the a-verse. Item (12c) has the same stress pattern as (12a) but its first foot has the dactylic word pattern Sxx. I refer to the Sxx/Sx pattern as type A1x. In this type, the Sxx foot departs from the Sx foot norm and adds a fifth metrical position, exceeding the norm of four positions established by type A1. Two-word A1x shows a slight attraction to the a-verse even though it has the same optimal weight as type A1.

Syllables normally occupy metrical positions (N7). Extrametrical syllables create complexity and the degree of complexity varies according to the kind of extrametrical constituent involved. As the lightest, least obtrusive constituents, extrametrical unstressed prefixes add least to the complexity of a verse.²³ Other extrametrical constituents add more complexity and exert a stronger influence on verse placement.

- (13) (a) *þegne / (ge-)sealde* (2810b) Sx/(x)Sx (33:97)
 ‘gave to a thane’
 (b) *hatode / (ond) hýnde* (2319a) Sx/(x)Sx (3:0)
 ‘persecuted and injured’

In b-verses like (13a), the weakly stressed syllable of a finite verb stands in its optimal location. Such variants are attracted to the b-verse despite the extrametrical prefix. In otherwise similar variants like (13b), non-prefixal *ond* adds more complexity, sharply restricting the number of instances, all of which are a-verses with double alliteration.

Item (14) shows the distribution of A1 variants with two extrametrical syllables in medial position (excluding a few variants that also have anacrusis). In most of these extended variants, the first foot is realized optimally as a word.

- (14) (a) *hýde / (sē ðe) wylle* (2766b) Sx/(xx)Sx (1:3)
 ‘let him hide (it) who will’
 (b) *ealle / (ofer-)cōmon* (699b) Sx/(xx)Sx (5:2)
 ‘overcame all’

- (c) *wunder* / (*æfter*) *wundre* (931a) Sx/(xx)Sx (27:3)
 ‘wonder after wonder’
 (d) *stonc* *ðā* / (*æfter*) *stāne* (2288a; cf. 2623a) S:x/(xx)Sx (2:0)
 ‘sniffed then along the stones’

In variants like (14a), the long medial dip exerts an attraction to the a-verse but this effect is counteracted by optimal placement of a finite auxiliary. The variants like (14b) are attracted to the a-verse despite optimal placement of their finite main verbs, which are somewhat more prominent than auxiliaries. Attraction to the a-verse is stronger for variants like (14c), which end in a still more prominent noun or adjective. In a pair of A1 variants like (14d), an S:x word group in the first foot is followed by two extrametrical syllables. Both instances are a-verses with double alliteration.

The A1 variants with three extrametrical syllables before the second foot are represented in item (15).

- (15) (a) *sealde* / (*þām ðe hē*) *wolde* (3055b) Sx/(xxx)Sx
 ‘gave to whom he wished’
 (b) *þegnas* / (*syndon ge*) *þwēre* (1230a cf. 590a, 2690a) Sx/(xxx)Sx
 ‘(the) thanes are loyal’
 (c) *Wēn* *ic* / (*þæt gē for*) *wlenco* (338a) S:x/(xxx)Sx
 ‘I think that you (came) out of pride’
 (d) (*Of*) *slōh* *ðā* / (*æt þēre*) *sæcce* (1665a) (x)S:x/(xxx)Sx
 ‘slew then in that strife’

These exceptional variants are strongly attracted to the a-verse. Item (15a), the only b-verse, realizes its first foot as a trochaic word and ends with a finite auxiliary, features that create strong attractions to the closing half of the line. In every a-verse, demarcative alliteration identifies the point at which the unusually long dip ends and the second foot begins. Item (15c) realizes the first foot as a word group and (15d) adds further complexity with anacrusis. Here we observe the extreme limits of flexibility in the uniquely tolerant Old English type A1.

Language change had predictable consequences for type A1 despite curatorial efforts by the poets. As the inflectional system decayed, unstressed function words proliferated and poets had to find room for them. The minimal innovation was to use extrametrical words more frequently in positions where they had always been acceptable. Type A1 provided two sites for long dips and Middle English poets would take full advantage of these sites. Use of alliteration to mark the end of an unusual dip would become more helpful as dips became longer and began to incorporate more words with intermediate stress. Use of archaic SOV constructions could help maintain the Proto-Germanic contour of the

line, but these constructions would seem increasingly odd. Middle English poets used them less often and began to experiment with alliteration on the final stress of the b-verse, which had predominant stress in SVO constructions (section 5.7). Type A1 was unaffected by one important language change. Since it did not employ compound feet, this type was not vulnerable to a decline in the productivity of compounding and could maintain its predominance throughout the history of the meter.

3.5 Type C (x/Ssx, xx/Ssx, x/Sxx, and xx/Sxx)

In type C, the light first foot is realized as an unstressed function word with the pattern x or xx. In two-word C verses, the second foot is usually realized as an Ssx compound or an Ssx derivative with a stressed suffix. A minor C subtype has a second foot with the dactylic pattern Sxx. The subordinate constituent of an Ssx compound retains significant prominence and may occur as an independent word. In (16a–b), for example, the subordinate constituent is a form of *weg* ‘way, region,’ which also occurs in *Beowulf* as an independent noun.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| (16) | (a) | <i>of / feorwegum</i> (37a) | x/Ssx (55:27) |
| | | ‘from distant regions’ | |
| | (b) | <i>geond / widwegas</i> (840a) | x/Ssx (6:0) |
| | | ‘throughout distant regions’ | |
| | (c) | <i>ofer / hronrāde</i> (10a) | xx/Ssx (69:21) |
| | | ‘over the whale-road (= the sea)’ | |

In (16c), the unstressed function word is disyllabic and the basic metrical pattern has a long initial dip. A few variants like (16b) have double alliteration, which is difficult to achieve in two-word type C due to constraints on compound formation. Given the universal linkage of alliteration to stress, subordinate stress also makes the second constituent of a compound less optimal as a candidate for alliteration. With its one primary word stress, two-word type C is light relative to the verse norm of two primary word stresses (N3). The resulting metrical complexity attracts two-word type C to the a-verse.

Extrametrical syllables cannot appear inside a metrical foot.²⁴ In type C, extrametrical syllables appear adjacent to the light foot, creating long initial dips. There is no strict limit to the number of extrametrical syllables in type C. I will not distinguish systematically here between metrical syllables of the light foot, which is realized by the most prominent word in the dip, and adjacent extrametrical syllables. See section 4.2 for analysis of unstressed words with varying prominence.

- (17) (a) *on þām / holmclife* (1421a) xx/Ssx (134:46)
 ‘on the sea-cliff’
 (b) *ymb hyra / sincgyfan* (1012a) xxx/Ssx (49:15)
 ‘around their treasure-giver’
 (c) *þāra þe mid / Bēowulfe* (1051a) xxxxx/Ssx (17:6)
 ‘those who (journeyed) with Beowulf’

Initial dips usually have two syllables. Trisyllabic dips (17b) are not uncommon, but frequency falls off for longer dips (17c). Like (16a–c), (17a–c) are light relative to the type A1 norm and have higher frequency in the a-verse.

In verses departing from the type A1 norm it will be important to distinguish **word stress** from **phrasal stress**. Foot patterns correspond to word patterns created by word-level stress rules. Verse and line patterns correspond to phrase patterns created by phrase-level stress rules. Each stress level has its own distinct norms.²⁵

In type C, realization of the Ssx foot as a word group affects **complexity** in two ways. Departure from the two-word norm adds an element of complexity at foot level but the second primary **word stress** in the group brings the verse up to standard weight. Verse counts to the right of the examples are based on realization of the second foot, disregarding variation in dip size. Initial dips with one or more unstressed syllables are notated collectively as (x)x. Variants with isolated unstressed prefixes are excluded for separate discussion in item (19).

- (18) (a) *Nū / scealc hafað* (939b) (x)x/S:sx (3:51)
 ‘now a man has (done)’
 (b) *on / wang stigon* (225b) (x)x/S:sx (19:136)
 ‘disembarked onto land’
 (c) *tō / hām faran* (124b) (x)x/S:sx (8:43)
 ‘to go home’
 (d) *on / hand gyfen* (1678b) (x)x/S:sx (2:22)
 ‘given in hand’
 (e) *on / dēop water* (509b) (x)x/S:sx (44:139)
 ‘in deep water’

Entries in item (18) are arranged according to the prominence of the verse-final word. We begin with the lightest verb forms, finite auxiliaries and the copula (18a). Then come more **prominent** finite main verbs (18b), followed by the still more prominent infinitives (18c), participles (18d), and words such as nouns and adjectives (18e). Adherence to the weight norm (N3) attracts most variants like (18a–e) to the closing half of the line, counter-acting violation of the foot norm (N4) and any complexity added by extrametrical syllables (N7). At the beginning of types A3, B, and C,

extrametrical syllables create a much weaker attraction to the a-verse than in type A1 (N8).

A total of 61 type C verses realize the light foot as an isolated unstressed prefix.

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| (19) | (a) <i>ge-/sēon mihte</i> (571b) | x/S:sx (0:40) |
| | ‘might see’ | |
| | (b) <i>ge-/þyld hafa</i> (1395b) | x/S:sx (0:13) |
| | ‘have patience’ | |
| | (c) <i>for-/grand gramum</i> (424a) | x/S:sx (5:3) |
| | ‘ground down the foes’ | |

In (19a–c), the boundary between prefix and root counts as a metrical word boundary. Variants like (19a–b), with an auxiliary or finite main verb in final position, appear only in the b-verse. Most variants like (19b) end in quasi-auxiliaries like *have*. The closest parallels in the a-verse are like (19c), with a word that is not a verb in final position. With light feet realized as prefixes primarily in the b-verse, it requires little effort to distinguish light feet from *anacrusis*, which appears primarily in the a-verse. In the a-verse it is almost always safe to exclude an isolated verse-initial prefix from the metrical pattern. In the b-verse it is almost always safe to count any unstressed verse-initial syllable as a light *foot*. Failure to distinguish a light foot from anacrusis would create uncertainty about the number of feet in the verse, the only structural feature that all verses have in common. I will adopt the term *metrical constant* for such an obligatory structural feature.²⁶ Extrametrical words facilitate scansion in type C, making it even easier to distinguish the light foot from anacrusis, which is normally monosyllabic and never extends beyond two syllables. The frequency of extrametrical words in type C is much higher than in types A, D, or E, the types in which extrametrical words obscure verse structure.

Some type C variants contain an Ssx word with one root syllable. These variants stand farther from the type A1 norm than variants with Ssx compounds and are more strongly attracted to the a-verse.

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| (20) | <i>þā / sēlestan</i> (416a) | (x)x/Ssx (51:15) |
| | ‘the best’ | |

In variants like (20), a short medial vowel in the Ssx word is followed by two consonants, the first of which closes the medial syllable and makes it long by position (section 1.7). Such long syllables receive subordinate stress at word level. The constituents that bear this stress are not *roots*. They cannot appear as independent words and can never receive primary *word stress*. They are typically suffixes followed by inflectional endings.

In the very lightest verses traditionally classified as type C, the second foot is realized as a weak class II verb with an unstressed medial syllable.²⁷

- (21) *Swā / rīxode* (144a) (x)x/Sxx (16:5)
 'thus he ruled'

The second foot scans as Sxx rather than as Ssx in variants like (21). Such variants are abnormally light and are attracted to the a-verse. Observe that the dactylic Sxx verb in (21) stands in an alliterating position, contravening (N1). A finite verb does not create an attraction to the b-verse in such cases. Sxx verbs were not very common in Old English and were vulnerable to replacement by closely related class I verbs with the optimal pattern Sx.²⁸ Light type C was marginal to begin with and would play no part in the evolution of Middle English meter.

Type C could adapt to a higher frequency of function words in later English because its initial dip imposed no limits on extrametrical words, which actually facilitated scansion in this type. A decline in the productivity of compounding would inhibit construction of two-word C verses, however. Evolution of type C was strongly influenced by the weight norm for the verse (N3) and by the SOV prominence norm for the line (N1). The combined effects of N1 and N3 attracted two-word type C to the a-verse, counteracting the effect of adherence to N4, a foot-level norm. As the frequency of two-word realizations declined, their traditional placement in the a-verse would give them a marginal appearance. By the Middle English period, type C was vanishingly rare in the a-verse (section 7.5). Type C variants with a word group in the second foot were not threatened by language change. After word-foot principles had been lost, the traditional high frequency of these variants in the b-verse would have given them the appearance of optimal realizations.

3.6 Types Da (S/Ssx), Dax (Sx/Ssx), Light Da (S/Sxx), and Light Dax (Sx/Sxx)

In typical two-word variants of the S/Ssx pattern, the Ssx foot is realized as an Ssx compound with two root syllables.²⁹ Such variants appear 104 times in the a-verse and 65 times in the b-verse. Distribution within this set of 169 variants is affected by reduction of the second root syllable in certain compounds.

- (22) (a) *sweord / Bīowulfes* (2681b) S/Ssx (24:44)
 'Beowulf's sword'
 (b) *fēond / mancynnes* (164b) S/Ssx (11:19)
 'enemy of mankind'

- (c) *wyrm* / *wōhbogen* (2827a) S/Ssx (51:0)
 ‘serpent crooked-bent’
 (d) *broden* / *ealowæge* (495b) S/Ssx (18:2)
 ‘decorated ale-cup’

The sx constituents of (22a–b) appear elsewhere as independent words with primary word stress. As subordinate constituents of compounds, they received secondary word stress. This subordinate stress could be further reduced by *lexicalization*, a process that eventually transforms routinely used compounds into *simplex* words.³⁰ Old English proper names provide a convenient sample of lexicalized compounds. As it turns out, variants like (22a) reverse the usual pattern of distribution for type Da, with 24 a-verses and 44 b-verses. In this heavy type, reduced stress on the s position creates variants that are less abnormally heavy and routes them selectively to the b-verse.

For Ssx constituents with unreduced secondary stress we can turn to compounds that do not appear in prose and are created primarily for metrical reasons.³¹ The form *wōhbogen* in (22c) is a typical *poetic compound*. Its first constituent, *wōh*, adds a second alliteration and a mandatory fourth syllable but adds nothing essential to the denotation (all bent things are crooked). Another type of poetic compound is a metaphorical substitute for an ordinary term, for example *wæl-rest* ‘slaughter-bed,’ used in *Beowulf* 2902a as a semantically inessential substitute for *wæl-stōw* ‘place of slaughter, battlefield,’ the term employed in prose. In item (22d), the Ssx compound does not occur in the surviving prose texts but it is formed in the usual way, without redundant or metaphorical constituents. Variants like (22d) are normally a-verses but appear occasionally in the b-verse. Da variants with poetic compounds never appear in the b-verse and always employ a second alliterating syllable to facilitate scansion.

If not managed carefully, the *prominent* secondary constituent of a poetic compound might be perceived as an unacceptable third foot in type Da. This problem does not arise because the poet uses alliteration to clarify *foot* structure. Given the universal relation between alliteration and stress, *alliteration* marks a constituent as more prominent than non-alliterating constituents. In poetic compounds, the mandatory *sound echo* on the S position acts like stress assignment in ordinary compounds, subordinating the second constituent by elevating the *prominence* of the first. This technique is particularly effective because the poet never alliterates on the *s position* in type Da. The s position of a poetic compound is unambiguously subordinate in this type and can never be confused with

a third foot. The same technique marks the s position as subordinate in all other verse patterns with two S positions followed by an s position (Db subtypes and the A2 subtype Sx/Ss).

Like two-word Da variants, two-word Dax variants usually realize the Ssx foot as a compound with two roots. Type Dax departs from the norm of four metrical positions, however, and has correspondingly lower frequency. For two-word Dax there are 107 attestations in *Beowulf*, as compared with 169 for two-word Da. The distribution of type Dax also testifies to its complexity. No more than 5 of the 107 Dax variants are b-verses, as compared with 65 of 169 for type Da.³² The contrasting distributions of Da and Dax illustrate the power of the four-position verse norm established by type A1. If the four-position norm had no inhibiting effect, Sx/Ssx would have higher frequency than S/Ssx, since Sx is the optimal foot pattern.

Some Da and Dax variants realize the second foot as an Ssx word with a closed medial syllable that is not a root. Verse counts are for two-word instances.

- (23) (a) *fyll* / *cyninges* (2912b) S/Ssx (24:48)
 'the king's downfall'
 (b) *þeoden* / *Scyldinga* (1675a) Sx/Ssx (6:0)
 'lord of the Scyldings'

The medial syllable in *cyninges* is not a root and could not stand alone as an independent word. It receives weak but perceptible stress at word level. As we have observed, Ssx words like *cyninges* take type C variants farther below the norm of two primary word stresses, creating an attraction to the a-verse. Words like *cyninges* bring Da variants closer to the norm, creating an attraction to the b-verse. Variants like (23a) were not vulnerable to a decline in the productivity of compounding. Their descendants acquired special importance in Middle English alliterative poetry (section 8.12). Since the medial syllable of *cyninges* could never have primary word stress, a second alliteration is not required to mark this syllable as subordinate in (23a). Only seven variants like (23a) have double alliteration, and these seven are more complex than the others, contravening N6 with two resolved syllables on the first S position.³³ In Dax variants like (23b), the complexity added by a fifth metrical position counteracts the effect of the Ssx word, creating a decisive attraction to the a-verse.

In the lightest verses traditionally classified as type Da, the s position of the Ssx foot is realized as an open non-root syllable that did not bear stress. I notate such verses as S/Sxx.

- (24) (a) *wēl* / *licodon* (639b) S/Sxx (1:66)
 ‘liked well’
 (b) *Bēowulf* / *maðelode* (405a) Sx/Sxx (25:1)
 ‘Beowulf spoke’

In type C, a *dactylic* Sxx foot takes the verse farther below optimal weight and creates an attraction to the a-verse. In type Da, an Sxx foot takes the verse down to optimal weight, creating an attraction to the b-verse. In otherwise similar Dax variants like (24b), the complexity added by a fifth metrical position counteracts the influence of the Sxx foot, creating an attraction to the a-verse.

In type A₁, as we have observed, an extrametrical syllable before the second foot causes less *complexity* than realization of the first foot as a word group. Such evidence for relative complexity is clear-cut because type A₁ has no inherent complexity to interfere with our measurements. In type Da, this kind of evidence can provide a determinate scansion for verses that might look ambiguous at first glance.

- (25) *lond* / (*ond*) *lēodbyrig* (2471a) S/(x)Ssx (12:3)
 ‘land and folk-town’

The evidence from type A₁ mandates analysis of (25) as type Da with an extrametrical word before the second foot. The alternative scansion, type Dax with a word group in the Sx foot, presupposes a more complex departure from the two-word norm in a verse type with greater inherent complexity. This scansion can be set aside as implausible.

In type C, an S:sx word group ending in a prominent word lifts verse weight closer to the A₁ norm, creating an attraction to the b-verse. In type Da, such a word group lifts the verse farther above the norm, restricting frequency and creating an attraction to the a-verse.

- (26) (a) *bær* / (*on*) *bearm scipes* (896a) S/(x)S:sx (2:0)
 ‘bore into the ship’s hold’
 (b) *drēfan* / *dēop water* (1904a) Sx/S:sx (3:0)
 ‘churn up the deep water’
 (c) *folc* / *tō sǣgon* (1422b) S/S:sx (0:8)
 ‘people looked on’
 (d) *Fērdon* / *forð þonon* (1632a) Sx/S:sx (1:1)
 ‘They fared forth from there’

There are two Da variants like (26a) and three Dax variants like (26b). All these are a-verses with a second alliteration marking the leftward boundary of the Ssx foot. Otherwise similar variants like (26c), which end with a weakly stressed finite verb or *function word*, are attracted to the

b-verse. One of two Dax variants like (26d) is attracted to the a-verse by the inherent complexity of its five-position pattern.

Anacrusis occurs in types Da and Dax, but only in the a-verse. Given the inherent complexity of these types, the additional complexity of anacrusis is excluded from the b-verse by the principle of closure.

- (27) (a) (of)lē̃t / lifdagas (1622a) (x)S/Ssx (8:0)
 ‘relinquished life-days (i.e., died)’
 (b) (on)brē̃d / (pā) bealohỹdig (723a) (x)S/(x)Ssx (3:0)
 ‘drew then hostile-minded’
 (c) (ge)sē̃on / sunu Hrē̃dles (1485a) (x)S/S:sx (1:0)
 ‘to see Hrethel’s son’
 (d) (Ne ge)fræ̃gn / (ic) frē̃ondlicor (1027a) (xx)S/(x)Ssx (2:0)
 ‘I never heard friendlier’
 (e) (ā)lē̃tan / lē̃ndagas (2591a) (x)Sx/Ssx (8:0)
 ‘to relinquish transitory days (die)’

Da variants like (27a) have one syllable in anacrusis and no other element of complexity. The variants like (27b) also have an extrametrical word before the second foot. Item (27c) adds the complexity associated with an S:sx word group. The variants like (27d) have two prefixal words in anacrusis and an extrametrical syllable in the medial dip. All of these variants use alliteration to mark the end of the unusual dip and the beginning of the second foot. As (27e) shows, anacrusis is also permitted in Dax a-verses, but no such verses have disyllabic anacrusis in *Beowulf*. No Dax verses with anacrusis have single alliteration or extrametrical words before the second foot. Here as elsewhere the inherent complexity of five-position Dax rules out additional kinds of complexity that are permissible in four-position Da.

Types Da and Dax were destined to survive in the Middle English a-verse. Although the productivity of compounding had declined, the Ssx pattern was still common in suffixed words, and this pattern was also available in anglicized French words. Da and Dax variants with prominent secondary stress had always been attracted to the a-verse. Double alliteration was normally present in these variants and mandatory in some of them. After language change obscured word-foot principles, poets could still perceive the number of stresses in a verse pattern and its typical number of alliterating syllables. To Middle English poets, Da and Dax would still look like heavy types most appropriately placed in the a-verse. The long dips permissible in these types would be exploited to the full as the frequency of indispensable function words increased.

3.7 Types B (x/Sxs and xx/Sxs) and Long B (x/Sxxs and xx/Sxxs)

In two-word type B, the first foot is realized as an unstressed word and the second foot is realized as a compound.

- (28) (a) *Swā / giōmormōd* (2267a) x/Sxs (4:4)
 ‘thus sad-hearted’
 (b) *swylce / giōmorgyd* (3150a) xx/Sxs (11:7)
 ‘likewise a sad song’
 (c) *ƿonon / ȳðgeblond* (1373a) xx/Sxs
 ‘thence the wave-tumult (rises up)’
 (d) *Scolde his / aldorgedāl* (805b) (x)x/Sxxs³⁴
 ‘his life-end would (be wretched)’

Type B resembles type C in several respects. In two-word B variants, the light foot can have one syllable, as in (28a), or two syllables, as in (28b–c). The number of extrametrical syllables is not restricted by rule. Two-word type B adheres to N₄, a foot-level norm. It falls below the weight norm of two primary word stresses, however, violating N₃, a verse-level norm. The verse-level norm exerts stronger influence than the foot-level norm, creating an attraction to the a-verse. Type B is distinguished from type C by the pattern of its second foot, which can be Sxs in the most common subtype or Sxxs in long type B. The Sxs pattern is derived from compounds like *giōmor-mōd*, with a trochaic first constituent, and from compounds like *ȳð-geblond*, with an unstressed *infix* (like a prefix but word-internal). The Sxxs pattern is derived from compounds like *aldor-gedāl*, with a trochaic first constituent and an unstressed infix as well. There are no Old English compounds with more than two metrical syllables between the stresses. Sxs compounds have lower frequency than Ssx compounds and Sxxs compounds have very low frequency. Item (28d) is the only type B verse with an Sxxs compound, and this compound would scan as Sxs if it retained its archaic form, which had non-syllabic final *-r* in the first constituent. Double alliteration is permitted in two-word type B, but constraints on compound formation made that difficult to achieve. The only obvious example in *Beowulf* is (28b), which contains the self-alliterating compound *giōmorgyd*.³⁵

In type B, as in type C, extrametrical syllables may be placed adjacent to the light foot. The following examples show the distribution of extrametrical syllables in B variants that realize the second foot as a compound word. The counts exclude two-word variants like (28b–c), in which all syllables are part of the basic pattern.

- (29) (a) *ðā on / undernmāel* (1428a) (x)x/Sxs (20:14)
 ‘then in the morning-time’
 (b) *on mīnre / ēpeltyrf* (410a) (x)x/Sxs (6:4)
 ‘on my home turf’

As in type C, an **extrametrical** word facilitates scansion by preventing confusion between light **feet** and anacrusis. Type B variants like (29a), with one extrametrical syllable, are more common than the corresponding variants with no **extrametrical syllable**. Frequency falls off for variants like (29b), which has more than one extrametrical syllable. As comparison with item (28) will show, extrametrical syllables exert little influence on placement of type B within the line.

In type B, as in type C, variants with a word group in the compound **foot** are attracted to the b-verse because they adhere to the verse-weight norm (N₃). There is an independent attraction to the b-verse for variants ending with a finite verb. A third attraction is added in B variants with a word group that imitates the structure of a compound. Item (30) shows the distribution for variants in which all three features favor placement in the b-verse. Verse counts include instances with an xx foot and instances with extrametrical syllables.

- (30) (a) *on / lande stōd* (1913b) (x)x/Sx:s (23:228)
 ‘stood on land’
 (b) *hīe / wyrd forsweop* (477b) (x)x/S:x-s (16:103)
 ‘fate swept them away’
 (c) *Hē / frætwe gehēold* (2620a) (x)x/Sx:x-s (18:78)
 ‘he held those weapons’

The variants in (30) all end with a finite verb. In (30a) the word group in the Sxs foot imitates the structure of compounds like *giōmor-mōd*, with a trochaic constituent followed by a stressed monosyllable. In (30b), a word group with an internal prefix (*fōr-*) imitates the structure of compounds like *ȳð-geblond*. In (30c), the word group *frætwe gehēold* imitates the structure of compounds like *sibbe-gedriht*. In the notations for (30b–c), the boundary between the prefix and the following root is marked by a hyphen. Variants like (30a–c) are strongly attracted to the b-verse. In variants like (30c), the greater **complexity** of the Sxxs foot makes the attraction less strong than for variants like (30a–b).

An attraction to the a-verse is introduced when the word group in the second foot ends with a prominent **lexical noun** or adjective. Except for the character of the final word, (31a) is like (30a) and (31b) is like (30c).

- (31) (a) *on / ancre fæst* (303a) x/Sx:s (109:154)
 ‘fast on (its) anchor’
 (b) *ofer / ȳðā gewewalc* (464a) xx/Sx:x-s (18:11)
 ‘over the expanse of waves’

The word group imitates the structure of a compound in (31a) and brings the verse up to normal weight. These factors create an attraction to the b-verse, but the prominent constituent on the final lift has a contrary effect and the relative frequency of b-verses is lower than for (30a). The inherent complexity of the Sxxs foot creates an additional attraction to the a-verse for variants like (31b).

The tolerance of its initial dip for added function words would provide an element of fitness for type B as the meter evolved. Long type B had a second long dip in its Sxxs foot and poets would employ this dip with increasing frequency. While word-foot principles were still operative, declining frequency of the Sxs and Sxxs word patterns would inhibit construction of two-word B variants and increase the perceived complexity of the compound foot, creating an attraction to the a-verse (N5). By the fourteenth century, type B had been excluded from the b-verse.

3.8 Type Db (S/Sxs), Dbx (Sx/Sxs), Long Db (S/Sxxs), and Long Dbx (Sx/Sxxs)

In type Db, as in type Da, S is the most common pattern for the first foot and there is an expanded subtype with an Sx foot (Dbx). The second foot parallels type B, with the pattern Sxs or Sxxs. Most two-word variants have a stressed simplex followed by a compound. Item (32a) is typical.

- (32) (a) *hār / hilderinc* (1307a) S/Sxs (32:2)
 ‘old battle-warrior’
 (b) *flet / innanweard* (1976b; cf. 991b)
 ‘the floor inside’
 (c) *sēon / sibbegedriht* (387a; cf. 729a) S/Sxxs (2:0)
 ‘to see the kindred band’
 (d) *enta / ærgeweorc* (1679a) Sx/Sxs (15:0)
 ‘ancient work of giants’
 (e) *oncȳð / eorla gehwām* (1420a) Sx/Sx:x-s (1:0)
 ‘misery to each earl’

Since its Sxs foot corresponds to compounds with lower frequency than Ssx compounds, type Db is more complex than type Da and has more restricted frequency overall, with 34 two-word realizations of S/Sxs as compared with 171 for S/Ssx. The b-verse instances, represented by item (32b), show a sharp frequency drop relative to corresponding b-verses of type Da, which occur 80 times in *Beowulf*. Both S/Sxs b-verses realize the Sxs foot as *innanweard*, with the s position occupied by *weard*. This is still a separable word in Old English, unlike its modern descendant *-ward* in

inward. Though not employed exclusively as a suffix, Old English *weard* often functions like a suffix and would be expected to undergo reduction of its secondary stress in a high-frequency form like *innanweard*. Reduced stress on the *s* position makes variants like (32b) less abnormally heavy and more appropriate to the closing half of the line. Due to the complexity added by a fifth metrical position, two-word realizations of long Db (32c) and expanded Db (32d) occur only in the a-verse. Item (32e), the only instance of expanded long Db, does not happen to contain one of the rare Sxxs compounds.

Locations for extrametrical words would be necessary for survival of a verse type in Middle English meter. Type Db permits an extrametrical word before the Sxs foot.³⁶

- (33) *hēold* / (on) *hēahgesceap* (3084a) S/(x)Sxs (5:0)
 ‘held to a high destiny’

The variants like (33) all have double alliteration. An alternative scansion as type Dbx with a word group in the first foot would presuppose a more complex departure from a more complex verse pattern and is set aside as implausible.

Anacrusis occurs in four Db variants with an Sxs compound in the second foot.

- (34) (a) (for)*barn* / *brōdenmæl* (1616a, 1667a) (x)S/Sxs
 ‘the damascened (sword) burned’
 (b) (on)*ginneð* / *geōmormōd* (2044a) (x)Sx/Sxs
 ‘begins with a sad mind’
 (c) (ofer)*wearp* / (pā) *wērigmōd* (1543a) (xx)S/(x)Sxs
 ‘then fell the weary (man)’

The other verse like (34a) is an exact repetition. Item (34b) is type Dbx with anacrusis. Item (34c) combines disyllabic anacrusis with an extrametrical word before the second foot. All these Db variants are a-verses with double alliteration.

Employment of an Sxs or Sxxs word group in the second foot makes a type B variant less abnormally light, creating an attraction to the b-verse. Such word groups make a type Db variant more abnormally heavy, restricting frequency and creating an attraction to the a-verse. Sxs and Sxxs word groups are carefully managed in type Db. Genuine examples may be rarer than at first appears.

The examples in item (35) realize the Sxs foot as an Sx word followed by a stressed monosyllable. Variants with anacrusis are excluded from the verse counts.

- (35) (a) *blēd* / *wīde sprang* (18b) S/Sx:s (0:22)
 ‘fame spread widely’
 (b) *bona* / *swiðe nēah* (1743b) S/Sx:s (1:6)
 ‘The killer (was) very near’
 (c) *frōd* / *folces weard* (2513a) S/Sx:s (14:0)
 ‘old guardian of the people’
 (d) *prȳðlic* / *þegna hēap* (400a) Sx/Sx:s (9:0)
 ‘splendid band of thanes’

In (35a–b), the last word in the group is modified by a preceding adverb. Such modifying adverbs subordinate a following verb, adjective, or adverb to form a “quasi-compound.”³⁷ In (35a), the wordlike character of the quasi-compound works together with optimal placement of the finite verb, creating a decisive attraction to the b-verse. The variants like (35b), with a quasi-compound ending in an adjective, include a single a-verse. Distribution differs strikingly for variants like (35c–d), which realize the second foot as a word group that is not a quasi-compound and has a prominently stressed word on the s position. These variants appear in the a-verse without exception. All have alliteration on the first word in the compound foot to show that the constituent on the s position, though linguistically prominent, is metrically subordinate. Use of word groups in Old English a-verse variants would create useful precedents for Middle English poets after the productivity of compounding declined and two-word type Db became more difficult to construct.

Another characteristic word group in type Db is a quasi-compound with a monosyllabic adverb and a prefixed finite verb.

- (36) (a) *līf* / *ēac gesceōp* (97b) S/S:x-s (1:26)
 ‘(he) also created life’
 (b) *līcað* / *leng swā wēl* (1854a) Sx/S:x:s (1:0)
 ‘pleases the longer the better’

Variants like (36a) are strongly attracted to the b-verse. Item (36b) is the only Db variant with a verse-final word group bearing no resemblance to a compound. As expected, this variant appears in the a-verse with alliteration on the second S to guide intuitive scansion of the unusual S:x:s word group.

Sxxs word groups are carefully managed in the second foot of long type Db.

- (37) (a) *word* / *inne ābēad* (390b) S/Sx:x-s (0:6)
 ‘he announced the message within’
 (b) *þegn* / *nytte behēold* (494b) S/Sx:x-s (0:5)
 ‘the thane did his duty’

- (c) *metod / manna gehwæs* (2527a) S/Sx:x-s (3:0)
 ‘the ruler of every human being’
 (d) *oncȳð / eorla gehwæm* (1420a) Sx/Sx:x-s (1:0)
 ‘misery to each of the earls’

The variants like (37a) realize the Sxxs foot as a quasi-compound with a finite verb in final position. These variants are attracted to the b-verse. In (37b–d), the Sxxs word group is not a quasi-compound. Variants like (37b), which end with a finite verb, are attracted to the b-verse despite the complex realization of the compound foot. In the variants like (37c–d), the Sxxs word group ends with a word that is not a verb. All these variants are a-verses with a second alliterating syllable to facilitate scansion.

A few Db variants with a word group in the second foot have anacrusis as an added element of complexity.

- (38) (a) *(Ā)rīs / rīces weard* (1390a) (x)S/Sx:s (5:0)
 ‘arise, protector of the land’
 (b) *(ge)hnūegde / helle gāst* (1274a) (x)Sx/Sx:s (3:0)
 ‘defeated the spirit of hell’
 (c) **(ge)fēollon / (on) fēonda geweald* (constructed) *(x)Sx/(x)Sx:x-s
 ‘they fell into the power of demons’

The variants like (38a–b) are all a-verses with a prominently stressed noun or adjective in final position, and they all employ a second alliteration to mark the predominance of the first word in the Sxs group. There are no corresponding examples with an Sxxs group and no corresponding examples with an extrametrical syllable before the second foot. An Old English poet could easily have constructed something like (38c), a Dbx variant with anacrusis, an extrametrical word in the medial dip, and an Sxxs word group. Such verses do not occur because the *additive effect* of so many complex features in a complex verse pattern would make intuitive scansion impossibly difficult. Constructing variants like (38c) will provide useful thought experiments as we explore the evolution of the meter. Such variants and their scansions will be marked as hypothetical with an asterisk.

After word-foot principles had been lost, types Db and Dbx would still be recognizable as patterns characteristic of the a-verse. Realization of the second foot as a word group, already common in *Beowulf*, would occur more often in these patterns when the productivity of compounding declined. As the number of indispensable *function words* increased, long type Db would acquire special importance. This type had three locations for *long dips*: in anacrusis before the first foot, medially before the second foot, and inside the long Sxxs foot.

3.9 Type E (Ssx/S)

In type A, reversing the order of feet leaves the Sx/Sx metrical pattern unchanged. The order of feet cannot be reversed in types B and C because an x or xx constituent would acquire stress in verse-final position, becoming metrically equivalent to S or Sx. Type Da can undergo metrically significant reversal, however, and the result is type E (Ssx/S). Placement of a compound foot at the beginning of the verse increased complexity, in part because the high-frequency types B and C established verse-final position as normal for compound feet. The optimality of verse-final position also shows the influence of Behaghel's law, a tendency to place heavier elements after lighter ones.³⁸ The most complex heavy types do not undergo reversal in *Beowulf*. Type Dax does not appear in reversed form as *Ssx/Sx. Types Db and Dbx do not appear in reversed form as *Sxs/S, *Sxxs/S, *Sxs/Sx, or *Sxxs/Sx.

Placement of type E within the line depends on the type of word in final position. Counts in item (39) are for two-word realizations with an unreduced noun or adjective root on the s position of the first foot.

- (39) (a) *Gūðbyrne / scān* (321b) Ssx/S (7:69)
 'The war-corselet shone'
 (b) *dryhtmāðma / dēl* (2843a) Ssx/S (71:47)
 'a share of noble treasures'

In type D verses, employment of an Ssx poetic compound requires a second alliteration and restricts placement to the a-verse. In verses like (39a), however, mandatory alliteration on the poetic compound coincides with mandatory alliteration on the first metrical stress of the verse and no second alliteration is required. Variants like (39a), with a finite auxiliary or main verb in final position, favor the b-verse. Variants like (39b), with a more prominent word in final position, favor the a-verse.

Type E variants in *Beowulf* employ several archaic SOV constructions. As in item (39), counts are for two-word realizations with prominent s constituents.

- (40) (a) *mancynne / fram* (110b) Ssx/S (0:8)
 'from mankind'
 (b) *frēodrihten / mīn* (1169b) Ssx/S (1:4)
 'my noble lord'
 (c) *gūðbeorna / sum* (314b) Ssx/S (3:21)
 'a certain one of the war-men'

The weakly stressed function word follows its governed noun in (40a), a postpositional phrase; in (40b), with a possessive pronoun in final position; and in (40c), with a quantifier in final position. With their

weak but significant stress, these postposed constituents are well suited to the non-alliterating lift at the end of the line. Variants like (40a–c) are attracted to the b-verse.

Type E allows for variants with an extrametrical syllable before the second foot. Counts in (41a–b) are for verses with prominent s constituents.

- (41) (a) *wallseaxe / (ge)brēd* (2703b) Ssx/(x)S (2:13)
 ‘drew a battle-knife’
 (b) *winernes / (ge)weald* (654a) Ssx/(x)S (5:2)
 ‘possession of the wine-hall’
 (c) *Wergendra / (tō) h̄ȳt* (2882b) Ssx/(x)S (0:1)
 ‘too few defenders’

A finite verb in final position attracts most variants like (41a) to the b-verse, while a more prominent noun or adjective in final position attracts most variants like (41b) to the a-verse. Use of extrametrical constituents is strictly regulated in the inherently complex type E pattern. In variants with unreduced stress on the s constituent, the extrametrical syllable is always realized in the least disruptive way, as an unstressed prefix. The unique (41c) has non-prefixal *tō* as an extrametrical constituent and a suffixed Ssx word in the first foot. In this variant, light stress on the suffix brings the verse closer to normal weight and creates an attraction to the b-verse. The greater complexity of *anacrusis* is forbidden outright in type E.

Type E has three lifts and is heavy relative to the type A1 norm. A syllable of reduced stress on the s position brings a type E variant closer to optimal weight. Two-word variants with Ssx proper names are attracted to the b-verse.

- (42) (a) *Higelāce / bær* (2988b) Ssx/S (1:12)
 ‘bore to Hygelac’
 (b) *Hrōþgāres / scop* (1066b) Ssx/S (2:14)
 ‘Hrothgar’s poet’

In variants like (42a), a finite verb in optimal position provides an added attraction to the b-verse. In variants like (42b), the Ssx proper name creates an attraction to the b-verse despite a prominent noun or adjective in final position. Compare the otherwise similar variants like (39b), which are attracted to the a-verse.

Use of Ssx word groups is carefully managed in type E to avoid overlap with type Db.

- (43) (a) *twelf wintra / tīd* (147a) S:sx/S (type E)
 ‘twelve winters’ time’
 (b) *frōd / folces weard* (2513a) S/Sx:s (type Db)
 ‘old guardian of the people’

Given the word-stress pattern SSxS in a verse with three **prominent** words, the audience had to decide in real time whether to interpret this pattern as Ssx/S (type E with a word group in the first foot) or as S/Sxs (type Db with a word group in the second foot). Without an effective marker for its foot boundary, such a verse would appear to consist of three word feet, violating the two-foot metrical constant. Foot boundaries were aligned with syntactic boundaries to avoid this kind of metrical ambiguity.³⁹ When a verse has the word-stress pattern SSxS, the **foot** boundary must fall at the major **syntactic break**. The two stressed words in the compound foot must occupy the same syntactic sub-constituent, with the third stressed word outside this constituent. Consider item (43a). The noun form *tīd* is singular, so the verse must mean [*a period*] [*of twelve winters*] rather than [*twelve*] [*periods of winter*]. The stressed words *twelf* and *wintra* occupy the same sub-constituent and the verse divides as S:sx/S. Now consider (43b). This means [*old*] [*guardian of the people*]. The stressed words *folces* and *weard* occupy the same sub-constituent and the verse divides as S/Sx:s. Syntax and demarcative **alliteration** work together to highlight **foot** boundaries. In type Db, a second alliteration always falls on the second metrical stress, marking the leftward boundary of the compound foot. In type E, a second alliteration almost always falls on the third metrical stress, marking the final S foot as more **prominent** than the medial **s position**.⁴⁰ The same syntactic and alliterative constraints distinguish Da variants with three stressed words (S/S:sx) from variants of type A2a (S:s/Sx).

Type E was vulnerable to a rise in the frequency of unstressed **function words**. It allowed no **extrametrical** constituents before the first foot. Extrametrical constituents before the second foot were normally unstressed prefixes in this type. Like compounds, unstressed prefixes were fated to decline in productivity. By the Modern English period, the once-common *ge-* prefix was reduced to a few archaic remnants like the *y-* in *yclept* ‘called.’ Type E was also vulnerable to extinction because of its similarity to type Db, a much fitter verse pattern with three locations for **long dips**. The syntactic rule distinguishing these types in *Beowulf* makes crucial reference to word-foot boundaries and would be impossible to learn after word-foot principles were lost. To skilled Middle English poets, the type E verses of *Beowulf* would look like abnormally short Db verses with peculiar syntax.

3.10 Type A2a (Ss/Sx)

Type A2a resembles type E in several respects. It exceeds the normal weight of two stressed syllables, does not permit **anacrusis**, and adds additional

complexity by placing the compound foot in verse-initial position. The effect of added weight can be seen in two-word A2a variants with a long stressed syllable on the S position of the second foot.

- (44) (a) *sincfæt / sōhte* (2300a) Ss/Sx (8:3)
 ‘he sought out the precious cup’
 (b) *Hrōðgār / sōhton* (339b) Ss/Sx (1:3)
 ‘they sought out Hrothgar’
 (c) *Hrōðgār / grētan* (1646b) Ss/Sx (1:6)
 ‘to greet Hrothgar’
 (d) *Hrōðgār / lēofa* (1483a) Ss/Sx (6:3)
 ‘beloved Hrothgar’
 (e) *eftsīð / eorla* (1891a) Ss/Sx (72:0)
 ‘return journey of the earls’

Prominent stress on the s position makes type A2 heavier than normal, creating an attraction to the a-verse even in variants like (44a), which ends with a finite verb. In otherwise similar variants like (44b), which has an Ss proper name, the stress on the s position is reduced and b-verses predominate. Reduction of the stress on the s position creates an attraction to the b-verse even when the verse-final word is a more prominent verbal infinitive or participle, as in (44c). A-verses begin to predominate when a still more prominent noun or adjective stands in final position, as in (44d). In variants with prominent stress on the s position and a verse-final noun or adjective, there is a decisive attraction to the a-verse (44e).

A variant of subtype A2a, called A2ak by Sievers, has an unresolved short stressed syllable in the second foot. Item (45) is an example of this variant that ends with a prominent noun.

- (45) *rūmheort / cyning* (2110b) Ss/Sx (10:8)
 ‘the open-hearted king’

An unresolved syllable in the second foot of variants like (45) creates an attraction to the b-verse.⁴¹ Variants like (45) are distributed almost evenly within the line, contrasting with otherwise similar variants like (44e), which appear only in the a-verse.

Although anacrusis is forbidden outright in type A2a, an *extra-metrical* syllable is permissible before the second foot.

- (46) (a) *geolorand / (tō) gūpe* (438a) Ss/(x)Sx
 ‘(to bear) a yellow shield to battle’
 (b) *Wiglāf / (wæs) hāten* (2602a; cf. 1649a)
 ‘he was called Wiglaf’
 (c) *Bēowulf / (wæs) brēme* (18a, manuscript reading)
 ‘Beowulf was famous’

The only unambiguous instance is (46a). The verses like (46b–c) have reduced stress on the s position and could also be scanned as type A1 variants with the reduced stress on an x position. Item (46c) betrays a misunderstanding of the poet's sources and is emended in the standard edition to *Bēow was brēme*, an unambiguous type A1 variant.

A decline in the productivity of compounding would make it more difficult to construct two-word realizations of type A2a. Since it imposed severe restrictions on extrametrical syllables, type A2a was also endangered by the rising frequency of unstressed function words. By the fourteenth century, when new principles of verse construction had evolved, type A2a was too heavy for the b-verse and too short for the a-verse.

3.11 Other A2 Subtypes (Ss/Ss, Sx/Ss, and Sxx/Ss)

The heaviest A2 subtype, Ss/Ss, has a disyllabic compound in each foot.

- (47) (a) *glædman / Hrōðgār* (367b) Ss/Ss (4:5)
 'glad-man Hrothgar'
 (b) *gūðrinc / goldwlan* (1881a) Ss/Ss (16:0)
 'war-man gold-proud'

In the b-verses like (47a), the second foot is occupied by an Ss proper name with reduced secondary stress. Such variants might also be scanned as Ss/Sx, with reduced secondary stress on the x position. The unambiguous Ss/Ss variants are all a-verses like (47b). Ss/Ss is the only Old English verse pattern with four lifts. Its extreme departure from the weight norm sharply restricts its frequency. As with the pattern Ss/Sx, the Ss/Ss pattern did not permit anacrusis and restricted extrametrical syllables in the medial dip. This marginal A2 subtype was doomed to extinction.

The A2b subtype Sx/Ss has a trochaic foot followed by a compound foot.

- (48) (a) *lēofa / Bēowulf* (1854b, 1987b) Sx/Ss (8:8)
 'dear Beowulf'
 (b) *Grendles / gūðcræft* (127a) Sx/Ss (23:0)
 'Grendel's war-strength'

In the b-verses like (48a), the Ss constituent has reduced secondary stress. These verses might also be analyzed as Sx/Sx, with the reduced stress on an x position. The unambiguous Sx/Ss variants are all a-verses like (48b). The Sx/Ss subtype restricts function words less severely than the other A2 subtypes. Extrametrical words are permissible in anacrusis and before the second foot, as in types A1, Da, and Db.

A final A2 subtype has the pattern Sxx/Ss, with the first foot realized as a dactylic Sxx word or as an S:xx word group. Item (49) is a two-word example.

- (49) *tryddode / tīrfest* (922a) Sxx/Ss (18:0)
 ‘walked in lasting glory’

The dactylic Sxx foot, which corresponds to an unusual word pattern, restricts the frequency of this subtype and attracts it decisively to the a-verse, in accord with N5.

The A2 subtype Sx/Ss was vulnerable to a decline in the productivity of compounding. With its tolerance for extrametrical syllables, however, this subtype could adapt to a rising frequency of function words. Like the heavy D subtypes, Sx/Ss would survive in the Middle English a-verse. Loss of word-foot principles would make it impossible to distinguish the Sxx/Ss subtype from Sx/(x)Ss, an ordinary A2 variant with an extrametrical syllable before the second foot. Descendants of Sx/(x)Ss and Sxx/Ss would be perceived as variants of the same pattern in Middle English alliterative verse.

3.12 Type A3 (xx/Sx and xx/Ss)

The pattern xx/Sx has only one metrically significant stress.⁴² Its extreme lightness restricts it categorically to the a-verse.

- (50) (a) *þæt ðū mē ne for-wyrne* (429a) (x)xx-/Sx (295:0)
 ‘that you not refuse me’
 (b) *oð þæt ymb / āntīd* (219a) (x)xx/Ss (22:0)
 ‘until in due time’

A3 verses have two or more unstressed syllables followed by an Sx word, as in (50a), or by an Ss word, as in (50b). Dips with extrametrical syllables are more common in this type than in types B and C. The xx/Ss variants like (50b) are closer to standard weight than those like (50a). They have restricted frequency for purely grammatical reasons. When preceded by several function words, a verse-final compound would usually have an overt inflectional ending, and the resulting pattern would be type C (xx/Ssx).

As we have observed, there is an attraction to the a-verse for the lighter variants of types B and C, with one primary word stress and one secondary word stress. Since the xx/Sx pattern is even lighter, its strict confinement to the a-verse is expected. In *Beowulf*, type A3 provided a convenient location for the movable function words in a clause extending over several

verses, allowing for employment of two-word variants in the rest of the clause. The shift to SVO syntax imposed new constraints on movement of function words and loss of word-foot principles left type A₃ with little reason to exist. As heavy types concentrated in the opening half of the Middle English *line*, type A₃ would look increasingly anomalous. It was eventually eliminated by a rule requiring two primary lifts in every a-verse.

3.13 Sx//Sx/Sx, xx//Sx/Sx, and Other Hypermetrical Patterns

Hypermetrical a-verses consist of an alliterating foot followed by a complete normal verse that alliterates on its first lift. The mandatory double *alliteration* restricts placement to the opening half of the line. Anacrusis is permissible before the first foot. Alliteration on the third lift is not permissible. In the most common subtypes, the embedded normal verse is a two-word A₁ variant or an A₁ variant realized as a compound. The major *syntactic break*, marked with a double slash, falls between the first foot and the embedded normal verse. Feet within the embedded verse are separated by a single slash as usual.⁴³

- (51) (a) *mægen mid // mōdes / snyttrum* (1706a) S:x//Sx/Sx (6X)
 ‘might with skills of mind’
 (b) *mon on // middan-/gearde* (2996a) S:x//Sx/Sx (1X)
 ‘(any) man on middle-earth’

Considered in isolation, hypermetrical a-verses look like exceptions to the rule that each verse consists of two feet. In poems like *Beowulf*, however, every hypermetrical verse is adjacent to at least one other hypermetrical verse in a *hypermetrical cluster*. The rule allowing only one *foot* of a normal verse to be long creates a no-man’s-land between normal and hypermetrical types.⁴⁴ Transition from the normal system to the hypermetrical system is perceptible as a sudden increase in verse size. The embedded normal verse functions as a *foot* of higher order. Hypermetrical verses fall under the general rule that the verse has two feet. The higher-level foot manifests itself most clearly when realized as a whole-verse compound, as in (51b). This happens with significant frequency.⁴⁵

Hypermetrical b-verses have a light xx *foot* followed by an embedded normal verse. Varying numbers of extrametrical syllables adjacent to the light foot are represented for convenience as (x) in the scansions to the right.

- (52) (a) *p̥c̥er p̥ā // gōdan / twēgen* (1163b) xx//Sx/Sx (0:9)
 ‘where the two good men (sat)’
 (b) *syððan hīe ðā // m̥c̥erða / (ge)slōgon* (2996b; (x)xx//Sx/(x)Sx (0:2)
 cf. 1706b)
 ‘after they had earned that glory’

In isolation, (52a–b) would look like violations of the rule forbidding more than one syllable of anacrusis in the b-verse. In *Beowulf*, however, such b-verses always appear in hypermetrical clusters and are clearly not A1 variants with peculiar *anacrusis*. Both variants like (52b) have an extra-metrical prefix before the second foot of an embedded type A1 verse.

A decline in the productivity of compounding would reduce the frequency of hypermetrical variants that realized the embedded verse as a compound word. The SxSx pattern was still available, however, in native suffixed forms and in anglicized French words. Restriction of heavy hypermetrical types to the Old English a-verse supported an evolving restriction of all heavy types to the Middle English a-verse. Restriction of two-stress hypermetrical types to the Old English b-verse supported an evolving requirement of two and only two metrical stresses in the Middle English b-verse. With ample room for unstressed *function words*, Old English hypermetrical patterns were destined to survive and proliferate.

3.14 Summary

The simple, natural principles of Old English meter had intricate consequences for placement of a verse within the *line*.⁴⁶ Realization of a *foot* as a word group created complex variants that were attracted to the a-verse, all other things being equal. When such variants ended with a finite verb, however, they were attracted to the b-verse by a more influential norm applying at the level of the line. The *Beowulf* poet was remarkably adept at judging the overall *complexity* of a verse and placing it in a suitable location. This skill would be difficult to explain without the hypothesis that metrical entities are derived from linguistic entities and, once *internalized*, can be manipulated with the same automatic facility. As SVO constructions replaced archaic SOV constructions, characteristic features of verse types led to predictable changes in alliterative meter. Our survey of types in the era of *Beowulf* has revealed evolutionary strengths in some and fatal weaknesses in others.

From Late Old English Meter to Middle English Meter

4.1 Historical Metrics

This chapter surveys predictable developments in alliterative meter after *Beowulf*, which was probably composed around AD 700.¹ The most important evidence for these developments comes from *The Battle of Maldon*, a late Old English poem about one-tenth the size of *Beowulf*. Our language-based theory makes many **predictions** and testing them systematically can compensate for a smaller body of evidence. Suppose, for example, that the theory predicts an increase in frequency for a variant with an extrametrical word. If *Beowulf* provides one instance of the variant, one instance in *Maldon* will represent a tenfold increase in frequency. Since *Maldon* provides only one instance, however, the frequency rise might be due to chance. This kind of prediction has limited weight on its own, like the prediction that a flipped coin will land heads-up. Predicting that a coin will land heads-up nineteen times out of twenty is quite a different matter.² Making the correct prediction for a variety of cases can validate a theory even if each prediction has limited weight. An array of predictions is questionable if the researcher has ignored an important false prediction or has failed to make a prediction explicit enough for proper testing (has failed, in technical idiom, to make the prediction *falsifiable*). From a statistical point of view, however, what matters is the probability of chance occurrence for the whole array of successful predictions.

Poetic **universals** provide additional help in dealing with a small corpus. The **principle of closure** makes it possible to deduce the complexity of a verse pattern from its placement within the **line**. The **universal** principle of “interest” provides help of a different kind.³ We would expect Old English poets to use complex types at appropriate frequencies for metrical variety, with frequent return to the norm for metrical coherence. As Ruth Lehmann pointed out, the *Beowulf* poet does exactly that, pairing the optimal type A1 with a more complex verse pattern in a typical **line**.⁴ For

maximum interest, a poet would observe a consistent interval between occurrences of a given metrical **variant**, distributing it evenly throughout the work. Such an effort could provide good coverage of the metrical possibilities in a rather small sample. As it turns out, Old English poets are remarkably adept at making the metrical rounds. Surprising though it may seem, we could deduce the essentials of Cynewulf's meter from the shortest Old English poem bearing his runic signature: *Fates of the Apostles*, a work of 122 lines. In Cynewulf's longer poems, as in *Beowulf*, the distribution of types and **variants** in a random sample of 100 lines comes quite close to their distribution within the entire work.⁵ With 324 lines, *Maldon* should provide a representative sample of metrical practice in the late tenth century.

The evidence of *Maldon* would be difficult to interpret if the poet no longer grasped the principles of word-foot meter. Several kinds of evidence show that these principles, though more difficult to implement, were not yet lost. Two-word type A1, the simplest realization of the simplest pattern, provides the most informative statistics. In *Beowulf*, two-word A1 variants like *wordum mælde* 'spoke with words' comprise 14 percent of total verses. In *Maldon*, the frequency is slightly under 12% (77/650). Comparable two-word phrases did not often occur by chance and both frequencies required effort to maintain (section 3.2). In *Beowulf*, 57 percent of the two-word A1 variants appear in the b-verse. In *Maldon*, the relative frequency of b-verses jumps to 96 percent (74/77). Placement in the closing half of the line shows that the Maldon poet still perceived two-word type A1 as the metrical optimum. The shift to the b-verse is attributable in part to complex new **variants** that demanded room in the a-verse, their only appropriate location. Concentration of two-word type A1 in the b-verse would also have communicated the metrical norm more emphatically to a late Old English audience faced, like the poet, with the cultural disruptions of language change.

As it became more difficult to avoid unstressed **function words**, we would expect a rise in the frequency of variants with extended dips. Variants of a formulaic line depicting cowardice, the binary opposite of heroism, can illustrate this trend.⁶

- (i) (a) *flugon on fæsten and feore burgon* (El 134)
'fled to (that) safe place and saved (their) lives'
- (b) *flugon on þæt fæsten and hyra feore burgon* (Mald 194)

Example (1a) is from Cynewulf's *Elene*, composed between 775 and 850.⁷ Example (1b) is from *The Battle of Maldon*, which narrates an event datable

to AD 991 and was probably composed soon afterwards.⁸ Translation of (1a) into Modern English requires addition of the parenthesized function words. Item (1b) translates word for word.

4.2 Classification of Metrical Lifts, Metrical Dips, and Extrametrical Dips

Generalizing across verse types, we can classify metrical and extrametrical positions according to the prominence of the corresponding linguistic constituents. The positions are presented below in order of **prominence**, beginning with the most prominent. For concision, I refer to a stressed word as occupying a **lift** if its stressed syllable occupies a lift, whether or not the word also contains unstressed syllables that occupy x positions.

- Level 1 The dominant lift corresponds to a syllable with primary **word stress** and prominent **phrasal stress**. It is the first lift in the verse and it subordinates following lifts (section 2.9). The dominant lift is most often occupied by a prominently stressed noun or adjective. Finite verbs with subordinate phrasal stress may occupy the dominant lift but this seldom occurs when there is a prominent noun or adjective in the same verse. When a verse contains two stressed words differing in prominence, the more prominent word normally stands first on the more prominent lift (Sievers's rule of precedence).
- Level 2 A subordinate lift corresponds to a syllable with subordinate stress. The second **S position** in a verse corresponds to a syllable with primary word stress and subordinate phrasal stress. The **s position** corresponds to a syllable with subordinate word stress. A subordinate lift provides an appropriate location for finite verbs and other constituents with weak but perceptible stress. The final lift of the b-verse, which requires stress but does not permit **alliteration**, is the optimal site for all finite verbs except finite forms of *wesan* 'to be.' In heavy verses with more than two lifts, the relative prominence of subordinate lifts can be indicated by subdividing level 2 into 2.1, 2.2, etc.
- Level 3 A light **foot** corresponds to an unstressed **function word**. It is the most conspicuous and least heavily restricted kind of metrical dip. Though normally realized as an unstressed word, it can be realized as a constituent with weak but perceptible stress such as a finite verb. It is never realized as a prominent noun or adjective.

In a handful of apparent exceptions, the stress on the noun or adjective is subordinated in a predicate nominative or predicate adjective construction.

- Level 4 A foot-internal dip corresponds to one or more unstressed syllables in a stressed word and is normally realized with such syllables. Alternative **realizations** are typically prefixes or inconspicuous **function words** with zero stress. The internal dip of an Sx foot is occasionally realized as a finite form of *wesan*, the verb of highest frequency and lowest prominence. Realization of level-4 dips with other verbs is permissible but very rare, much rarer than with dips at level 3. No verb ever appears in the internal dip of an Sxs or Sxxs **foot**.
- Level 5 An **extrametrical** dip before the second foot interrupts the metrical pattern and should be as inconspicuous as possible. It is realized most often as an unstressed prefix, sometimes as an isolated preposition, a pronoun, or some other **function word** with zero stress. In a few cases, the Beowulf poet realizes an extrametrical dip as a finite form of *wesan*.
- Level 6 An **extrametrical** dip in **anacrusis** is subject to very strict constraints due to the risk of confusion between anacrusis and light feet. It is normally realized as an unstressed prefix in the a-verse. Non-prefixal realizations are **function words** with zero stress, typically prepositions. No verb of any kind may appear in anacrusis. The number of syllables in anacrusis is limited to two, the maximum number of syllables in an Old English prefix.

4.3 Poems Surveyed for Evidence of Metrical Evolution

Metrical change in the late Old English period can be illustrated in a group of five poems: *Beowulf*, Cynewulf's *Elene*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *Judith*, and *The Battle of Maldon*.⁹ *Elene* provides a second long poem in strict traditional meter.¹⁰ Verse frequencies common to *Beowulf* and *Elene* represent standard metrical practice before the tenth century. *Brunanburh*, a small heroic poem of 73 lines, narrates an event datable to AD 937. *Brunanburh* still adheres well to the metrical style of *Beowulf*. *Judith*, a tenth-century poem of 349 lines, also avoids conspicuous departure from traditional norms, though as we shall see some innovations have emerged. The meter of *Maldon* is widely regarded as peculiar, especially with regard to employment of unstressed words. *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* have many important features in common. Both employ traditional

formulaic language to narrate recent historical events. Significant metrical differences between these poems can hardly be due to chance. *Maldon* provides our most important evidence for metrical change during the late Old English period.

4.4 Metrical Responses to Reduction of Unstressed Vowels

Metrical changes in *Maldon* are attributable to a major sound change that occurred not long after the composition of *Brunanburh*. As Fulk observes, “by the late tenth century scribes regularly confuse all unstressed vowels, indicating the sort of vowel centralization that accompanies the general lowering of levels of stress.”¹¹ Given the heavy investment of energy in the first syllable of a Germanic word, any general diminution of that energy leaves non-initial syllables vulnerable to reduction and loss. The first step in English was reduction of unstressed inflectional vowels to schwa, a central vowel pronounced in the most relaxed articulatory position, which requires the least energy. The next step, completed in early Modern English, was outright loss of schwa in most phonetic environments (section 10.1).¹²

When *Maldon* was composed, many grammatical endings were no longer distinguishable from one another and the ambiguity was resolved by more frequent employment of function words.¹³ An ambiguous dative inflection, for example, would increasingly be clarified by a preposition like *to* or *for*. Ambiguous definite inflections would be clarified by a determiner equivalent to modern English *the* or *that*. A verb inflection no longer provided adequate identification of the subject. The *Beowulf* poet could omit subject pronouns to improve the meter but this option was becoming unworkable in the tenth century. Shortly after the battle of Maldon took place, Ælfric was modernizing poetic diction, for example by transforming *lȳtle werode*, a traditional formula, into *mid lȳtlum werode* (section 3.2). This extension of the formula replaced an archaic instrumental construction with a modern prepositional phrase. In an earlier poem, Ælfric’s version of the formula would arouse suspicion as a type A1 variant that never appears in *Beowulf*.¹⁴

As R. D. Fulk observes, “It is sometimes difficult not to portray late aberrations from classical norms as representing decline rather than simple change.”¹⁵ Reflexive dispraise of *Maldon* is surely inappropriate.¹⁶ This poem narrates a complex military engagement in an unusually detailed, knowledgeable, and well-organized fashion unparalleled in any other Old English poem, *Beowulf* included. In narrating the battle of Ravenswood, for example, the *Beowulf* poet represents only two combats, each involving

only two combatants (lines 2961–81). On a smaller scale, the *Maldon* poet tinkers artfully with formulaic language when close proximity would create a repetitious effect, just like the *Beowulf* poet.¹⁷ *Maldon* differs from *Beowulf* primarily because language change made it impossible to maintain the same degree of metrical concision.

4.5 Evolution of Extrametrical Dips in Anacrusis

The word-foot theory identifies type A1 as the most favorable site for metrical experiments. With no inherent complexity, this type has maximum tolerance for departure from its two-word norm (section 3.4). We first consider placement of prefixes and function words in anacrusis before the first alliterating syllable of type A1, at level 6. In *Beowulf*, the frequency of anacrusis for this type is 2 percent (42/2,045). Of the 42 instances, 35 are a-verses (83 percent). In the a-verse, the *Beowulf* poet normally realizes anacrusis as an unstressed prefix, the least conspicuous kind of extrametrical constituent. The verses with non-prefixal anacrusis are represented in item (2).

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------|
| (2) | (a) (<i>wið</i>) <i>ord ond</i> / (<i>wið</i>) <i>ecge</i> (Beo 1549a) | (x)S:x/(x)Sx (4X) |
| | ‘against spear and sword’ | |
| | (b) (<i>Tō</i>) <i>lang ys</i> / (<i>tō</i>) <i>reccenne</i> (Beo 2093a) | ?(x)S:x/(x)Ssx (1X) |
| | ‘It is too lengthy to narrate’ | |
| | (c) (<i>Hū</i>) <i>lomp ēow</i> / (<i>on</i>) <i>lāde</i> (Beo 1987a) | (x)S:x/(x)Sx (1X) |
| | ‘How did it go for you on the journey?’ | |
| | (d) (<i>swā</i>) <i>guman ge-</i> / <i>frugnon</i> (Beo 666b) | (x)S:x/Sx (4X) |
| | ‘as men had heard’ | |

Most of the a-verse instances have a preposition in anacrusis, like item (2a). Prepositional anacrusis is a fairly short step from prefixal anacrusis. Most Old English prefixes are derived from prepositions and still look like them. The step from prefixal anacrusis is not much farther in (2b), which has a prepositional adverb in anacrusis. This verse is emended to type A1 in the standard edition. Item (2c) is the only a-verse example with a wholly non-prepositional element in anacrusis: *hū*, used here as an adverb. Anacrusis occurs less often in the b-verse but the relative frequency of non-prefixal anacrusis is higher: 57 percent (4/7), as compared with 17 percent for the a-verse (6/35). In all but one of the verses like (2d), the word in anacrusis is *swā*, used as a conjunction (cf. 93b and 1223b). In the remaining example (2247b), the word in anacrusis is *nū* ‘now, now that,’ also used as a conjunction. Minimizing non-prefixal anacrusis in the a-verse helps distinguish syllables in anacrusis from light feet.¹⁸

The frequency of anacrusis in *Maldon* has risen to 11 percent in type A1 (23/216), as compared with 2 percent in *Beowulf*. Constraints on non-prefixal anacrusis have also been weakened in the later poem.

- (3) (a) (*for*) *hēawen* / (*æt*) *hilde* (Mald 223a) (x)Sx/(x)Sx (4X)
 'hewn down in battle'
 (b) (*mid*) *gafole* / (*for*) *gyldon* (Mald 32b) (x)Sx/(x)Sx (4X)
 'to buy off with tribute'
 (c) (*Tō*) *lang hit* / (*him*) *pūhte* (Mald 66b) (x)S:x/(x)Sx (2X)
 'it seemed too long to him'
 (d) (*and*) *georne* / (*ge*) *sāwon* (Mald 84b; cf. 182a, 282b) (x)Sx/(x)Sx (4X)
 'and clearly saw'

Variants like (3a), with prefixal anacrusis, no longer predominate, accounting for just 17 percent of total instances (4/23). Variants like (3b), with prepositional anacrusis, are not uncommon in *Beowulf*, but more complex forms of anacrusis have achieved conspicuously higher frequency in *Maldon*. There is a pair of instances like (3c), with a prepositional adverb. The much longer *Beowulf* has a single instance. The coordinating conjunctions *and* 'and' and *ac* 'but' have very high frequency in Old English but are never used for anacrusis in *Beowulf*. The much shorter *Maldon* has three instances like (3d), with *and*, and another with *ac* (Mald 193a). Half of these are a-verses. Making relatively little use of prefixal anacrusis in the a-verse, the *Maldon* poet has no reason to concentrate non-prefixal anacrusis in the b-verse.

There are no analogues in *Beowulf* for the remaining instances of type A1 with anacrusis, represented in item (4).

- (4) (a) (*Hē*) *scēafpā* / (*mid* *ðām*) *scylde* (Mald 136a; cf. 23a, 185a) (x)S:x/(xx)Sx
 'he shoved then with the shield'
 (b) (*his*) *ealdre* / (*ge*) *kēstan* (Mald 11b) (x)Sx/(x)Sx
 'to assist his lord'
 (c) (*Se*) *eorl was* / (*pē*) *blīpra* (Mald 146b; cf. 14a, 202b) (x)S:x/(x)Sx
 'the earl was the happier'
 (d) (*pē*) *āhte* / (*his*) *hlāford* (Mald 189b) (x)Sx/(x)Sx
 'which his lord had owned'
 (e) (*pæt*) *wūere* / (*hit* *ūre*) *hlāford* (Mald 240b) (x)Sx/(xxx)Sx
 'that it had been our lord'

A functioning inflectional system made it possible to leave pronouns and determiners unexpressed in the eighth century. These do appear in *Beowulf*, but not when they add unusual complexity to the verse. *Maldon* provides examples of anacrusis with a personal pronoun (4a), a possessive pronoun (4b), and a determiner (4c). Anacrusis also occurs with the relative pronoun *pē* 'which, that' (4d) and the subordinating conjunction

þæt ‘that’ (4e). If the variants in (4) were as likely to appear in *Beowulf*, we would expect to find 80 instances rather than none.

Non-prefixal anacrusis is less common outside type A1. There are three instances in *Maldon* (items (5a–c) and two in *Beowulf* (5d–e).¹⁹ If such variants occurred with equal frequency in both poems, we would expect thirty instances in *Beowulf*.

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| (5) | (a) (<i>Hē</i>) <i>bræc þone / bordweall</i> (Mald 277a) | (x)S:xx/Ss |
| | ‘he broke the shield-wall’ | |
| | (b) (<i>Se</i>) <i>flōd / ūt gewāt</i> (Mald 72a) | (x)S/S:x-s |
| | ‘the flood tide went out’ | |
| | (c) (<i>Pā</i>) <i>flotan stōdon / gearowe</i> (Mald 72b) | (x)S:xx/Sx |
| | ‘the sailors stood ready’ | |
| | (d) (<i>Hē ge</i>) <i>fēng þā / fetelhilt</i> (Beo 1563a) | (xx)S:x/Ss |
| | ‘He seized the linked hilt’ | |
| | (e) (<i>æt</i>) <i>fōtum // (sæt) frēan / Scyldinga</i> (Beo 1166a) | (x)Sx/(x)S/Ssx |
| | ‘sat at the Scylding lord’s feet’ | |

Item (5a) is a variant of type A2. A single A2 variant in the poem has prefixal anacrusis (Mald 138a). Item (5b) is a Db variant with the pattern S/Sxs. A single expanded Dbx variant has prefixal anacrusis (Mald 90a). *Maldon* contains no variants with prefixal anacrusis analogous to (5c), a type Ax variant with a determiner in anacrusis. Prefixal anacrusis is not favored in these variants from *Maldon*. Item (5d), a type A2 variant, is the only verse in *Beowulf* with a pronoun in anacrusis. There are 4 other A2 variants with prefixal anacrusis. Item (5e), a hypermetrical a-verse, has a preposition in anacrusis. *Beowulf* has twenty-two instances of prefixal anacrusis in type D but no instances of non-prefixal anacrusis. In heavy verses, which are inherently complex, the *Beowulf* poet tolerates the simplest kind of anacrusis but rarely employs the more complex kinds. The added complexity had to be tolerated in the era of *Maldon* because unstressed function words were more urgently required.

In Cynewulf’s *Elene*, anacrusis has an overall frequency of 2 percent (64/2,642). There are three instances of non-prefixal anacrusis in *Elene* and sixty-one instances of prefixal anacrusis. In the very small *Brunanburh*, anacrusis has the same overall frequency as in *Beowulf*, 1% (2/146). Both instances are of the simplest kind, type A1 with prefixal anacrusis. The overall frequency of anacrusis in *Judith* is 3% (18/696), higher than in *Elene* but lower than in *Maldon*. The three normal verses with anacrusis in *Judith* are unremarkable. All three are of type A1, two with prefixal anacrusis (Jud 196a, 258b) and one with prepositional anacrusis (Jud 116b). More conspicuous experiments with anacrusis occur in

hypermetrical a-verses, which comprise an unprecedented 17 percent of total a-verses in *Judith* (64/348). The next highest frequencies for hypermetrical a-verses are 4 percent for *Daniel* (34/764) and 2 percent for *Guthlac A* (17/818).

The frequency of anacrusis in hypermetrical variants is high in *Judith*. Of sixty-four hypermetrical a-verses in the poem, 8 (13 percent) have prefixal anacrusis, like item (6a).

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------------|
| (6) | (a) (<i>ge</i>) <i>rēnode</i> // <i>rēadum</i> / <i>golde</i> (Jud 338a) | (x)Sxx//Sx/Sx (8X) |
| | ‘decorated with red gold’ | |
| | (b) (<i>on</i>) <i>eorðan</i> // <i>un-lswæslīcne</i> (Jud 65a) | (x)Sx//S/Ssx (4X) |
| | ‘unpleasantly on earth’ | |
| | (c) (<i>se</i>) <i>riča</i> // (<i>on his</i>) <i>reste</i> / <i>middan</i> (Jud 68a) | (x)Sx// (xx)Sx/Sx (2X) |
| | ‘the mighty one amidst his bed’ | |
| | (d) (<i>Þā wearð</i>) <i>yrre</i> // <i>ānmōd</i> / <i>cynīng</i> (Dan 224a) | (xx)Sx//Ss/Sx |
| | ‘then the fierce king got angry’ | |
| | (e) # <i>Yrre</i> // (<i>þā wearð</i>) <i>ānmōd</i> / <i>cynīng</i> | Sx// (xx)Ss/Sx |

Corresponding frequencies are 9 percent for *Daniel* (3/34) and 18 percent for *Guthlac A* (3/17). *Judith* has four other variants like item (6b), with prepositional anacrusis. These comprise 8 percent of the hypermetrical a-verses in the poem (5/64). The corresponding figure for *Daniel* is 6 percent (2/34) and there are no such variants in *Guthlac A*. Anacrusis is realized twice in *Judith* with determiners, as in (6c). These are no such realizations in *Daniel* or *Guthlac A*. As we have seen, the *Maldon* poet employs determiners in anacrusis but the *Beowulf* poet never does so in any verse type. In *Judith* and *Maldon*, clearly, the need for function words modifying the first stressed word of the verse was weakening traditional constraints and anacrusis was less sharply delineated from other kinds of dip. A unique instance of a verb in anacrusis occurs with a finite form of *weorðan* in item (6d). This seems unlikely to be authentic, however. The emendation in (6e) employs an archaic word order still employed by poets but increasingly vulnerable to modernization by scribes. From here on the symbol < # > will be used for hypothetical emendations of my own that regularize the meter.

4.6 Evolution of Extrametrical Dips in Verse-Medial Position

Extrametrical words occur most freely in the medial dip of type A₁ when the first foot is realized as a trochaic word (section 3.4). There is a large sample of A₁ variants like those in item (7). For clarity, a few verses that also have anacrusis are excluded from the sample.

- (7) (a) *ealle* / (on) *wōcon* (Beo 111b) Sx/(x)Sx (151:228)
 'all awoke'
 (b) *beornas* / (on) *blancum* (Beo 856a) Sx/(x)Sx (76:12)
 'men on horses'
 (c) *geongum* / (ond) *ealdum* (Beo 72a) Sx/(x)Sx (46:12)
 'to young and old'

The least prominent extrametrical constituents have highest frequency in the medial dip (at level 5). As with extrametrical constituents in anacrusis (at level 6), prefixes outnumber prepositions, which in turn outnumber purely non-prepositional words such as pronouns, articles, and conjunctions. With over 300 instances in *Beowulf*, variants like (7a), with an extrametrical prefix, have about four times the frequency of those like (7b), with an extrametrical preposition. Variants like (7c), with a non-prepositional word between feet, have the lowest frequency. Distribution of variants like (7a) within the line shows that the extrametrical prefix adds little to complexity. The greater complexity of variants like (7b–c) creates a significant attraction to the a-verse.

In a poem one-tenth the size of *Beowulf*, we would expect about 30 instances like (7a), and in fact there are 26. Distribution of these variants in *Maldon* differs dramatically, however, with 23 of the 26 instances in the b-verse. As we have seen, two-word Sx/Sx, the simplest expression of type A1, has shifted to the b-verse in *Maldon*, freeing up room in the a-verse for the growing number of more complex variants. Type A1 variants like (7a) were evidently perceived as simple enough to participate in this shift. For variants like (7b), frequency and distribution are similar in the two poems, with 7 a-verses and 2 b-verses in *Maldon*, as compared with 79 a-verses and 11 b-verses in *Beowulf*. With 58 variants like (7c) in the larger poem, we would expect about 6 in *Maldon*, and in fact there are 5; but this smaller sample shows no bias toward the opening half of the line, with 2 a-verses and 3 b-verses. Extrametrical words that caused significant complexity in *Beowulf* were beginning to be perceived as routine and were less strictly regulated by the principle of closure.

In (8a–c), otherwise analogous to (7a–c), the first foot is realized as an S: x word group. The complexity added by the word group inhibits employment of extrametrical words in the medial dip.

- (8) (a) *Hete* was / (on) *hræred* (Beo 2554a) S:x/(x)Sx (6:9)
 'Hate was stirred up'
 (b) *Flota* was / (on) *ȳðum* (Beo 210b) S:x/(x)Sx (9:1)
 'The boat was on the waves'

- (c) *Cwico* was / (pā) gēna (Beo 3093b) S:x/(x)Sx (11:6)
 'He was still alive then'
 (d) *Forð ðā* / (ēode) Wistān (Mald 297b) S:x/(xx)Ss (0:1)
 'Forth then went Wistan'

Beowulf contains only 15 total variants like (8a), with an extrametrical prefix between the feet, as compared with over 300 like (7a). Variants like (8b), with an extrametrical preposition, total 10, as compared with 90 like (7b). Variants like (8c), with a non-prepositional word, total 17, as compared with 59 like (7c). Restrictions on extrametrical words in variants like (8a–c) bring out sharp differences between *Beowulf* and *Maldon*. *Maldon* has 11 variants analogous to (8a), with 8 a-verses and 3 b-verses. If such variants occurred as freely in *Beowulf*, we would expect about 110 instances rather than the 15 actually found. There are 4 variants like (8b) in *Maldon* and half of them are b-verses. If *Beowulf* had the same frequency for this variant, we would expect 40 instances rather than 10. *Maldon* has 10 variants like (8c), of which 4 are b-verses. The corresponding figure for *Beowulf* would be 100 instances rather than 17. Item (8d), a type A2 variant from *Maldon*, merits special attention because it has a finite main verb as an extrametrical constituent between the feet. This might also be analyzed as type A1, since the compound name *Wistān* has reduced stress on the second syllable and might scan as Sx rather than Ss. In *Beowulf*, main verbs never appear as extrametrical words in the medial dip of type A1 or A2 (at level 5). The only dips employed with significant frequency for main verbs in *Beowulf* are level-3 dips at the beginning of types A3, B, and C.

Late experimentation is more restricted in types A2, D, and E, which have significant inherent complexity. Differences between *Beowulf* and *Maldon* emerge when we consider variants with two extrametrical syllables in the medial dip. Here the number of instances is rather small and verse counts will include variants with extrametrical syllables in anacrusis.

- (9) (a) *Hyrte* / (hyne) *hordweard* (Beo 2593a) Sx/(xx)Ss (5:1)
 'the hoard-guardian took heart'
 (b) *deorc* / (ofer) *dryhtgumum* (Beo 1790a) S/(xx)Ssx (3:0)
 'dark over the troop-men'
 (c) *heals ealne* / (ymb)eƿēng (Beo 2691b) S:sx/(xx)S (0:1)
 'seized around his entire neck'
 (d) *ealle* / (būton) *ānum* (Beo 705a) Sx/(xx)Sx (46:9)
 'all but one'
 (e) *stonc ðā* / (æfter) *stāne* (Beo 2288a) S:x/(xx)Sx (7:0)
 'sniffed then along the stone'
 (f) *Secge* / (ic pē tō) *sōðe* (Beo 590a) Sx/(xxx)Sx (5:0)
 'I tell you in truth'

There are unambiguous instances in type A2 (9a) and type Da (9b). Scansion of (9b) as Sxx/Ssx is ruled out by the constraint against two long feet (section 3.3). Item (9c), the unique manuscript example in type E, has no value for metrical theory, since *ymbefēng* emends easily to *ymbfēng*, a form attested elsewhere in the poem.²⁰ With emendation to *ymbfēng*, (9c) scans as Ssx/(x)S, a common type E variant with a monosyllabic prefix before the second foot. The small group of examples like (9a–b) has higher frequency in the a-verse, as expected for complex variants. Item (9d) shows the distribution of somewhat simpler A1 variants with the first foot realized as a trochaic word. Several of these are b-verses. More complex variants like (9e) realize the first foot as an S:x word group. All of these are a-verses. Variants like (9f), with three extrametrical syllables between the feet, are also restricted to the a-verse.

Variants analogous to those in (9) have enhanced frequency in *Maldon*.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------------|
| (10) | (a) <i>Sende</i> / (ðā se) <i>sēirinc</i> (Mald 134a; cf. 297b) | Sx/(xx)Ss (1:1) |
| | ‘then the sea-warrior sent’ | |
| | (b) <i>wyrcean</i> / (þone) <i>wihagan</i> (Mald 102a; cf. 286a) | Sx/(xx)Ssx (2:0) |
| | ‘to form the battle-wall’ | |
| | (c) <i>wācian</i> / (æt þām) <i>wīge</i> (Mald 10a; cf. 28a) | Sxx/(xx)Sx (2:0) |
| | ‘to weaken at the battle’ | |
| | (d) <i>bēgen</i> / (þā ge) <i>brōþru</i> (Mald 305a) | Sx/(xx)Sx (7:2) |
| | ‘both the brothers’ | |
| | (e) (Hē) <i>scēaf þā</i> / (mid ðām) <i>scylde</i> (Mald 136a) | (x)S:x/(xx)Sx (2:0) |
| | ‘he shoved then with the shield’ | |
| | (f) (þā) <i>hwile</i> / (þe hē mid) <i>handum</i> (Mald 14a; cf. 240b) | (x)Sx/(xxx)Sx (1:1) |
| | ‘while he with (his) hands (could wield weapons)’ | |

Item (10a) is an A2 variant with the same pattern as (9a). With 2 examples in *Maldon*, we would expect 20 in *Beowulf* instead of 6. We would also expect 20 instances in *Beowulf* for variants like (10b), a Dax variant, and another 20 instances for variants like (10c), an Ax variant. In fact there are no instances of either variant in *Beowulf*. The complex A1 variants (10d–f) are analogous to (9d–f). Given the number of instances for these variants in *Maldon*, *Beowulf* would be expected to yield 100 instances like (10d) rather than 57, 10 instances like (10e) rather than 7, and 20 instances like (10f) rather than 5. There are no parallels in *Maldon* for variants like (9b) or (9c), but since these total no more than four in *Beowulf*, we would expect less than one in *Maldon*.

Variants with extended medial dips seem to have developed quite late. They do not show comparable frequency rises in the other poems sampled. Table 1 summarizes verse counts for variants represented in items (8–10), adding counts for *Elene*, *Brunanburh*, and *Judith*.

Table 4.1 *Medial Dips in Types A, D, and E*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
S:x/(x)Sx (A1)	42	25	none	9	25
Sx/(xx)Sx (A1)	55	24	1	4	9
S:x/(xx)Sx (A1)	7	none	none	none	2
Sx/(xxx)Sx (A1)	5	2	none	none	2
Sx/(xx)Ss (A2)	6	1	none	none	2
Sxx/(xx)Sx (Ax)	none	none	none	none	2
S/(xx)Ssx (Da)	3	1	none	none	2
S/(xxx)Ssx (Da)	none	none	none	1	none
Sx/(xx)Ssx (Dax)	none	none	none	none	2
Ssx/(xx)S (E)	1?	none	none	none	none
Verses in poem	6,364	2,642	146	698	648

The two most common A1 variants on the list show slightly enhanced frequency in *Elene*, which is a little more than two-fifths the size of *Beowulf*. For the first of these patterns, the frequency in *Judith* would correspond to 90 examples in *Beowulf* rather than the 42 examples actually attested. For the second A1 variant, however, *Judith* has only 4 examples, which would correspond to 40 in *Beowulf*, fewer than the 55 actually attested. Only *Maldon* shows such a consistent rise in frequency for extrametrical syllables in such a variety of verse-medial dips. This would be expected if *Judith* was somewhat earlier than *Maldon* and less strongly affected by loss of inflectional distinctions.

4.7 Evolution of Medial Dips in Hypermetrical Verses

Hypermetrical a-verses have two medial dips (section 3.13). In accord with the principle of closure, the second medial dip is more heavily restricted than the first. Dips are extended most frequently in the simplest hypermetrical pattern, Sx//Sx/Sx. This consists of an Sx foot followed by two-word type A1, the simplest normal variant. Variants with anacrusis are included in the counts.

- (11) (a) *dryhten // dūgeða / waldend* (Jud 61a) Sx//Sx/Sx (8X)
 ‘God, ruler of hosts’
 (b) *fæste // (be) feaxe / sinum* (Jud 99a) Sx/(x)Sx/Sx (14X)
 ‘firmly by his hair’

- (c) (*ā*)*gotene* // *gōda* / (*ge*)*hwylces* (Jud 32a) (x)Sx//Sx/(x)Sx (1X)
 ‘emptied of every good’
 (d) *wurpon* // (*hyra*) *wæpen* / (*of*)*dūne* (Jud 290a) Sx//((xx)Sx/(x)Sx (8X)
 ‘threw their weapons down’

The variants like (11a) have no **extrametrical** constituents in either medial dip. The variants like (11b) have an extrametrical syllable in the first medial dip. Item (11c) is the only instance with an extrametrical constituent in the second medial dip only. The variants like (11d) have extrametrical constituents in both dips. In the more tolerant first medial dip, an extrametrical constituent is typically an independent **function word**. There are no exceptions among the 24 variants like (11b) and (11d). Among these 24 variants there are 8 like (11d), with two extrametrical syllables in the first medial dip. In the second medial dip, an extrametrical constituent is always a prefix.

Hypermetrical a-verses can be constructed with initial foot patterns other than Sx. These more complex variants are less tolerant of extended medial dips. Variants with an initial Ss foot are illustrated in item (12).

- (12) (a) *swiðmōd* // *sinces* / *brytta* (Jud 30a) Ss//Sx/Sx (8X)
 ‘bold-minded distributor of treasure’
 (b) *mundbyrd* // (*æt ðām*) *mæran* / *þeodne* (Jud 3a) Ss//((xx)Sx/Sx (3X)
 ‘protection by the great lord’
 (c) *torhtmōd* // *tīðe* / (*ge-*) *fremede* (Jud 6a) Ss/Sx/(x)Sx (1X)
 ‘gave a gift, inclined to glory’

The most common such variant in *Judith* is the one free of extrametrical syllables, represented by (12a). Among the variants with the first medial dip extended, item (12b) has two extrametrical syllables and the others have just one. Item (12c) is the only instance with extension of the second medial dip. Here the extrametrical constituent is a prefix, as expected. There are no instances with both medial dips extended. Item (12) contrasts markedly with item (11), where variants with extended medial dips predominate.

In the remaining hypermetrical a-verse types, the medial dip is extended in one of sixteen instances (13d).

- (13) (a) *nēalēhte* // *niht sēo* / *þýstre* (Jud 34a) Ssx//S:x/Sx (2X)
 ‘the dark night drew nigh’
 (b) (*ge*)*rēnode* // *rēadum* / *golde* (Jud 338a) (x)Sxx//Sx/Sx (3X)
 ‘decorated with red gold’
 (c) *bealde* // *byrn-/wiggende* (Jud 17a) Sx//S/Ssx (9X)
 ‘bold armored warriors’
 (d) *ā tō* // (*ðām*) *æl-/mihtigan* (Jud 7a) S:x//S/Ssx (1X)
 ‘forever to the Almighty’

- (e) *sweord ond // swātigne / helm* (Jud 337a) S:x//Ssx/S (1X)
 ‘sword and bloody helmet’
- (f) *(ne) feax // fyre / (be)swāðled* (Dan 437a; cf. 225a) (x)S//Sx/(x)Sx (2X)
 ‘nor (was their) hair burned by fire’

Items (13a–b) have trisyllabic initial feet followed by a type A₁ variant. Items (13c–d) end with a light type Da variant. In (13d), the Da variant is realized as a compound word. Item (13e) ends with a two-word type E variant. Initial S feet are not common in hypermetrical a-verses. Unambiguous instances like (13f) show that they do occur, at least in some poems. Item (13d) might imaginably be scanned as S/(xx)S/Ssx and (13e) as S/(x)Ssx/S, with initial S feet and extrametrical words in the medial dip. The small size of the hypermetrical corpus can make it difficult to identify preferred scansions.

Table 4.2 summarizes the *Judith* poet’s employment of medial dips in the two most common hypermetrical a-verse patterns, adding counts from *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Daniel*, and *Guthlac A* for comparison. There are no hypermetrical verses in *Maldon*. All extended medial dips are represented by a single parenthesized (x), without regard for the number of added syllables. Instances with anacrusis are included in the counts as before.

Hypermetrical patterns had always allowed for placement of extrametrical words in medial dips. Even the small samples from *Beowulf* and *Elene* include an instance with both dips extended. All samples include an instance of Sx/(x)Sx/Sx, the optimal type with its first medial dip extended. In *Elene*, *Guthlac A*, and *Judith*, this is the most common variant. In *Beowulf* and *Daniel*, the variant without extrametrical syllables predominates, accounting for about half of the sample. In comparison with

Table 4.2 *Medial Dips in Hypermetrical A-Verses*

	Beowulf	Elene	Daniel	Guthlac A	Judith
Sx//Sx/Sx	3	0	12	3	8
Sx/(x)Sx/Sx	2	4	3	7	14
Sx//Sx/(x)Sx	none	2	1	none	1
Sx/(x)Sx/(x)Sx	none	1	3	none	8
Ss//Sx/Sx	none	none	2	1	8
Ss/(x)Sx/Sx	none	none	1	none	3
Ss//Sx/(x)Sx	none	1	none	none	none
Ss/(x)Sx/(x)Sx	1	none	1	none	1
total	6	8	23	11	43

Beowulf and *Daniel*, *Judith* expands the first medial dip more often in this hypermetrical type but not more often than *Elene* or *Guthlac A*. Overall, however, *Judith* expands medial dips more frequently than any of the other poems. *Beowulf* and *Guthlac A* make no use of the variant Sx/(x)Sx/(x)Sx, which has both medial dips extended. This variant has a frequency of 13 percent in *Elene* (1/8) and *Daniel* (3/23), as compared with 19 percent in *Judith* (8/43). *Guthlac A* and *Elene* make no use of the hypermetrical type Ss/Sx/Sx, which occurs twelve times in *Judith*, with extension of the first medial dip in three instances. *Judith* contains a single instance of Ss/(x)Sx/(x)Sx, the most complex variant in Table 4.2. The other two instances of this variant come from *Beowulf* and *Daniel*, which realize dips more cautiously in the most common hypermetrical type. Given surprises like this, we have no reason to suppose that a unique hypermetrical variant in *Judith* would have been unacceptable to the *Beowulf* poet. There were traditional precedents for extended medial dips in these verse types. What stands out in *Judith* is the frequency of extension. In this late poem, function words occupy level-5 locations where they had always been permissible but with the higher frequency demanded by language change.

Item (14) illustrates realization of medial dips in hypermetrical b-verses from *Judith*. The parenthesized (x) in initial position stands for any number of extrametrical syllables, which can be added freely to the initial dip. Parenthesized (x) positions in the more strictly regulated medial dip stand for a specific number of extrametrical syllables.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------|
| (14) | (a) <i>swylce ēac // sīde / byrnan</i> (Jud 337b)
'broad mail-coats as well' | (x)xx//Sx/Sx (46X) |
| | (b) <i>Hīe ðā on // reste / (ge)brōhton</i> (Jud 54b)
'then they brought her to bed' | (x)xx//Sx/(x)Sx (13X) |
| | (c) <i>swylce ēac // mēde / (on) heofonum</i> (Jud 343b)
'and reward in heaven as well' | (x)xx//Sx/(x)Sx (5X) |
| | (d) <i>swylce ēac // būnan / (ond) orcas</i> (Jud 18b; cf. 67b)
'cups and pitchers as well' | (x)xx//Sx/(x)Sx (2X) |
| | (e) <i>þe hyre // weorðmynde / geaf</i> (Jud 342b)
'who gave her honor' | (x)xx//Ssx/S (1X) |

Hypermetrical b-verses have a light initial foot with the pattern xx. The embedded normal verse is usually a two-word realization of type A1. The variant in (14a), with no medial dips extended, has the highest frequency. Realization of extended dips observes the usual order of frequencies in (14b–d), with prefixal extensions highest, followed by prepositional extensions and non-prepositional extensions. The variety of hypermetrical patterns is severely restricted in the closing half of the line.

Among 67 instances in *Judith*, 66 have the optimal pattern (x)xx//Sx/Sx, like (14a–d). The only other instance, (14e), has the pattern (x)xx//Ssx/S, with two-word type E as the embedded normal verse. The principle of closure also inhibits departure from the optimal verse pattern in *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Daniel*, and *Guthlac B*, which yield a total of 134 hypermetrical b-verses. All but 8 of these have the pattern (x)xx//Sx/Sx. There are no instances like (14e) in these poems, but a few other patterns occur.

- (15) (a) *p̃c̃er h̃ie p̃æt // āgl̃ac / drugon* (Dan 237b) (x)xx//Ss/Sx (3X)
 ‘where they endured that misery’
 (b) *Spr̃ac ð̃ā // id̃es / Scyldinga* (Beo 1168b) (x)xx//S/Ssx (4X)
 ‘the lady of the Scyldings spoke then’
 (c) *p̃ā h̃ē p̃yder // folc / samnode* (Dan 227b) (x)xx//S/Sxx (1X)
 ‘then he gathered a troop to that place’

Elene has only the optimal pattern (x)xx//Sx/Sx. *Daniel*, *Guthlac A*, and *Beowulf* each have a single instance of the pattern in (15a). The other three instances like (15b) occur in *Daniel*, and the variant in (15c) occurs only in *Daniel*. *Guthlac A* stands out among Old English poems in employing a hypermetrical b-verse pattern seventeen times in the a-verse. All seventeen instances have the optimal pattern (x)xx//Sx/Sx. In eight instances with an extended medial dip, the extension is limited to one syllable and is always realized as an unstressed prefix. In the a-verse, the pattern xx//Sx/Sx acquires a kind of complexity from its unusual placement and other kinds of complexity are inhibited.

Table 4.3 summarizes the *Judith* poet’s employment of medial dips in hypermetrical b-verse types, adding counts from *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Daniel*, and *Guthlac A* for comparison.

In the optimal pattern xx//Sx/Sx, all five poets extend the medial dip with significant frequency. The frequency of 30 percent for *Judith* stands near the middle of the range (22 to 44 percent). In the more complex types, none of the poets extend the medial dip. When we consider the kind of constituent used to extend the dip, *Judith* stands apart. In *Beowulf*, *Daniel*, and *Guthlac A*, the medial dip is extended only with prefixes. A preposition is used once for this purpose in *Elene* at 584b. In *Judith*, five variants out of twenty employ a preposition, as compared with one out of forty total instances in the other poems. Only *Judith* extends the medial dip with a conjunction (in item (14d)). Extension of the medial dip adds significant complexity to a hypermetrical b-verse. In the optimal type, extension normally consists of an unstressed prefix, the least conspicuous and least disruptive kind of extension. The prefix is also the constituent preferred for anacrusis, another kind of extension that causes complexity. In *Judith*, the

Table 4.3 *Medial Dips in Hypermetrical B-Verses*

	Beowulf	Elene	Daniel	Guthlac A	Judith
xx//Sx/Sx	7	10	38	31	46
xx//Sx/(x)Sx	2 (22%)	8 (44%)	12 (24%)	18 (37%)	20 (30%)
xx//Ssx/S	none	none	none	none	1
xx//Ss/Sx	1	none	1	1	none
xx//S/Ssx	1	none	none	1	none
xx//S/Sxx	none	none	3	1	none
prefixal	2	7	12	18	13
prepositional	none	1	none	none	5
non-prepositional	none	none	none	none	2

prefixal bias has been weakened in both kinds of extension: anacrusis in the hypermetrical a-verse and extension of the medial dip in the hypermetrical b-verse.

4.8 Medial Dips in Variants with the First **Foot** Realized as a Word Group

Extrametrical constituents lie outside the metrical pattern proper (section 3.4). In a medial dip, accordingly, **extrametrical** constituents at level 5 can be distinguished from constituents that occupy an x position in the first foot, at level 4.

(16) *Sōð is / (ge)cȳþed* (Beo 700b) S:x/(x)Sx
'the truth is known'

In item (16), unstressed *is*, the first word in the dip, fills the x position of the first foot and the *ge-* prefix is extrametrical. A constituent occupying an x position at level 4, inside the Sx foot, will be more **prominent**, on average, than a following extrametrical constituent at level 5. Non-prefixal **function words** are more likely to appear within an Sx foot than as extrametrical extensions of the medial dip.

Though less heavily restricted than extrametrical words, **function words** in an Sx foot are more heavily restricted than those occupying a level-3 dip in types A3, B, and C. Verse counts for *Beowulf* in item (17) include type A1 variants with and without extrametrical syllables in the medial dip.

- (17) (a) *forð on- / sendon* (Beo 45b) S:x/Sx (25:121)
 ‘sent forth’
 (b) *gold on / grēote* (Beo 3167a) S:x/Sx (92:9)
 ‘gold in the grit’
 (c) *grim ond / grēdig* (Beo 121a) S:x/Sx (70:20)
 ‘grim and greedy’
 (d) *cearu was / (ge)nīwod* (Beo 1303b) S:x/(x)Sx (8:14)
 ‘care was renewed’

Unstressed prefixes are the preferred substitutes for inflectional syllables in Sx words, as shown by the high overall frequency of variants like (17a) and their high relative frequency in the b-verse. A similar variant with a preposition in the first foot, represented by (17b), occurs less often, with higher frequency in the a-verse. A variety of non-prepositional function words, taken together, have the lowest frequency and occur most often in a-verses like (17c). Other variants like (17d), with a monosyllabic auxiliary in the first foot, have sharply lower frequency. Auxiliary verbs have high frequency in level-3 dips but seldom appear in level-4 dips.

Table 4.4 summarizes employment of variants like (17a–d) in *Judith* and the other poems surveyed.

Frequencies on Table 4.4 show some differences attributable to language change. In the late *Judith* and *Maldon*, there are relatively fewer variants with prefixes and relatively more with prepositions. Late poets needed prepositions as replacements for ambiguous case endings. In the “other non-verbal” category, the frequency for the late poems is about half the frequency for *Beowulf*, but the frequency for *Elene* is equally low. The most conspicuous anomaly is employment of main verbs in *Maldon* on the x position of an Sx foot (at level 4).

The level-4 verbs in *Maldon* appear in two identical verses like (18a).

Table 4.4 *Medial Dips in Variants with the First Foot Occupied by a Word Group*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
prefix	146 (41%)	68 (57%)	4 (40%)	7 (29%)	25 (34%)
preposition	101 (28%)	54 (36%)	3 (30%)	13 (54%)	17 (39%)
other non-verbal	90 (25%)	17 (11%)	3 (30%)	2 (8%)	6 (19%)
auxiliary	22 (6%)	11 (7%)	none	2 (8%)	4 (5%)
main verb	none	none	none	none	2 (3%)
total	359	150	10	24	54

- (18) (a) *Wæl fēol / (on) eorþan* (Mald 126b, 303b) S:x/(x)Sx
 'The slain fell onto the earth'
 (b) *ac hē / eorðan gefēoll* (Beo 2834b) xx/Sx:x-s
 'but he fell onto the earth'
 (c) *hægl fēol / (on) eorþan* (Seaf 32b; cf. Rid29, 12b) S:x/(x)Sx
 'hail fell onto the earth'
 (d) *God wāt on / mec* (Beo 2650b) S:s:x/S
 'God knows (this) about me'
 (e) *(æt) fōtum / (sæt) frēan Scyldinga* (Beo 1166a) (x)Sx/(x)S/Ssx
 'sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings'

The repeated formula has modern syntax, with the verb between the subject and a prepositional phrase. The noun object of the preposition is more prominent than the verb and less appropriate as an occupant of the dip. If the poet uses such constructions at all in type A1, a non-alliterating verb in the medial dip represents the minimum departure from traditional norms. In (18b), the *Beowulf* poet employs an archaic OV construction with the object of the preposition before the finite verb. Here the concept of motion toward is expressed by the accusative case ending on *eorðan*. The VO construction in (18a) expresses the same concept with the preposition *on*. Variants like (18a) were certainly in existence before *Maldon*. Similar variants like (18c) can be found in the *Seafarer* and the Old English *Riddles*. These poems are relatively hard to date but they might have been quite early and were composed well before *Maldon* in any case.²¹ The same syntax can be found in (18d), a type E verse from *Beowulf*. In (18d), however, the finite verb occupies an s position, which is more appropriate than an x position for the stressed syllable of a main verb. The only main verb occupying a medial dip in *Beowulf* is *sæt* in item (18e), a complex hypermetrical variant of the form (x)Sx/(x)S/Ssx. The *Maldon* poet was less reluctant to employ finite main verbs in a medial dip but had not lost contact with poetic tradition. Acceptable SVO variants simply provided a better fit with late Old English and achieved higher frequency for that reason.

Late Old English trends in verb placement also show up in type A1x (Sxx/Sx) and in the A2 subtype that was destined to survive (Sx/Ss).

- (19) (a) *hrēo wēron / yþa* (Beo 548b) S:xx/Sx
 'rough were the waves'
 (b) *Wigan wēron / bliðe* (El 246b) S:xx/Sx
 'the warriors were happy'
 (c) *Hæleð wēron / yrre* (Jud 225b; cf. 195b) S:xx/Sx
 'the warriors were angry'
 (d) *Bogan wēron / bysige* (Mald 110a) S:xx/Sx
 'bows were busy'

- (e) (*Īā*) *flotan stōdon / gearowe* (Mald 72b) (x)S:xx/Sx
 ‘the sailors stood ready’
- (f) *Strēet wæs / stānfāh* (Beo 320a) S:x/Ss (6X)
 ‘the street was stone-paved’
- (g) *Frōd wæs / (se) fyrdrinc* (Mald 140a) S:x/(x)Ss (4X)
 ‘wise was the troop-warrior’
- (h) *Wund wearð / Wulfmār* (Mald 113a) S:x/Ss
 ‘Wulfmār got wounded’
- (i) *Hyge wæs / (him) hinfūs* (Beo 755a) S:x/(x)Ss
 ‘his mind was eager to escape’

Items (19a–d) are A1x variants with the medial dip realized as a disyllabic form of the verb *to be*. Item (19a) is the only instance in *Beowulf*. The only instance in *Elene* is (19b). *Judith* has a pair of instances like (19c), which would correspond to twenty instances in *Beowulf*. Item (19d) is a comparable instance in *Maldon*. In (19e), the *Maldon* poet realizes the medial dip as *stōdon*, a verb of greater prominence than the verb *to be*. This is the only such A1x variant in the poems surveyed. The A1x variants from *Elene*, *Judith*, and *Maldon* all have modern word order. The single instance in *Beowulf* has an archaic construction now restricted to literary usage. Items (19f–g) are A2 variants with the medial dip realized as a monosyllabic form of the verb *to be*. The four instances of this variant in *Maldon* are equivalent to forty instances in *Beowulf*, but only six are attested in the earlier poem. What stands out in (19g) is extension of the medial dip with a determiner equivalent to the definite article *the*. This occurs in three of the four instances. In the remaining instance, item (19h), the determiner is absent for purely grammatical reasons. Proper names normally refer to a definite individual and do not normally require definite articles. In (19f), a determiner could have been used before *strēet* but the *Beowulf* poet omits it, avoiding non-prepositional anacrusis. In variants like (19f), the *Beowulf* poet never places a determiner in anacrusis and the only instance with extension of the medial dip is (19i). Here the extension is *him*, employed as an archaic dative of possession. The verse translates literally as “the mind to him was eager to escape.” Departures from norms in archaic variants established precedents for later variants with SVO syntax.

The SOV and SVO constructions in (19a–i) perform important metrical work. Reversal of the chosen word orders would yield metrical patterns that are much more complex or unmetrical, with the wrong word alliterating in some cases. All the poets surveyed here could employ SOV or SVO syntax as necessary to avoid unmetrical patterns. What increased was the frequency of acceptable SVO variants, a frequency that testifies to the

greater strength of the SVO norm in the late Old English period. Such evidence for language change comes into focus only within a theory that defines metrical norms in concrete linguistic terms and links the distribution of a variant to departure from those norms.

4.9 Evolution of Dips Between Stresses in Compound Feet (Sxs and Sxxs)

The simplicity of the equation *foot* = *word* made it possible for native speakers to intuit the complete set of foot patterns. This equation would be compromised if any word pattern were denied foot status arbitrarily. The price to be paid for such high-level simplicity was feet corresponding to unusual words. Compound feet with unusual patterns had to be realized as single words often enough to establish their metrical identity, but this became more difficult as the productivity of compounding declined.

The Sxs foot corresponds to compound words of relatively low frequency with a monosyllabic dip between the stresses. This foot is realized directly 134 times in *Beowulf* as a compound like *ellen-weorc* ‘deed of valor’ or *lif-gedāl* ‘loss of life.’ Direct realizations are distributed quite evenly throughout the poem, highlighting the linguistic basis of the foot about once every twenty-five lines.²² Most often, however, the Sxs foot is realized with an Sx:s word group like *flōdes æht* ‘the grip of the flood’ (762X), which mimics the structure of compounds like *ellen-weorc*. Somewhat less common are realizations of the Sxs foot with an S:x-s group like *dēað fornam* ‘death took away’ (171X), which mimics the structure of compounds like *lif-gedāl*. Realization of the Sxs foot as a word group is most frequent in type B, where Sxs word groups bring the verse up to normal weight. Sxs word groups have much lower frequency in the heavy type Db, where they make the verse even heavier.

The Sxs foot is sometimes realized as an S:x:s word group bearing a less obvious resemblance to a compound.

- | | | |
|------|--|----------------|
| (20) | (a) <i>ond his / cwēn mid him</i> (Beo 923b)
‘and his queen with him’ | xx/S:x:s (11X) |
| | (b) <i>bið se / slēp tō fast</i> (Beo 1742b)
‘that sleep is too fast’ | xx/S:x:s (6X) |
| | (c) <i>in / sele þām hēan</i> (Beo 713b)
‘in the high hall’ | x/S:x:s (26X) |
| | (d) <i>līcað / leng swā wēl</i> (Beo 1854a)
‘pleases the longer the better’ | Sx/S:x:s (1X) |

In (20a), the x position of the Sxs foot is occupied by a preposition. Word groups like *cwēn mid him* bear a certain resemblance to Sxs word groups like *eft on-wōc*, with the dip realized as a prefix derived from a preposition. In (20b), the medial dip is realized as a prepositional adverb. In (20c), it is realized as a non-prepositional function word. Item (20d) is the only type Db variant with an S:x:s word group in the second foot.

Table 4.5 provides counts from all the poems surveyed for realizations of the Sxs foot in type B.

In *Maldon*, the frequency of realizations with an Sxs compound is less than half that for the other poems surveyed. In the era of *Maldon*, language change had distanced the Sxs foot from its direct realization and type B had become more difficult to identify as a pattern with two word-feet.

Interpretation of counts in Table 4.5 can be checked against the relative frequency of a-verses, which would be expected to rise as type B became more complex. Table 6 provides the number of a-verses and b-verses for type B variants with Sxs compounds, Sx:s word groups, S:x-s word groups, and S:x:s word groups. Each set of verse counts is accompanied by the percentage of a-verses.

Brunanburh and *Maldon* have the same frequency of 100 percent for the Sxs variant represented on the top line. With that exception, *Maldon* has

Table 4.5 *Dips in the Sxs Foot of Type B*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
Sxs	71 (8%)	30 (6%)	2 (11%)	7 (7%)	3 (3%)
Sx:s	599 (72%)	393 (82%)	16 (84%)	74 (79%)	79 (77%)
S:x-s	123 (15%)	45 (9%)	1 (5%)	8 (9%)	16 (16%)
S:x:s	43 (5%)	14 (3%)	none	5 (5%)	4 (4%)
total	836	482	19	94	102

Table 4.6 *Frequencies for A-Verse Dips in the Sxs Foot of Type B*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
Sxs	41:30 (58%)	16:14 (53%)	2:0 (100%)	2:5 (29%)	3:0 (100%)
Sx:s	164:435 (27%)	127:266 (32%)	2:14 (13%)	29:45 (39%)	32:47 (41%)
S:x-s	17:106 (14%)	9:36 (20%)	0:1 (0%)	1:7 (13%)	6:10 (38%)
S:x:s	13:30 (30%)	6:8 (42%)	none	1:4 (20%)	3:1 (75%)

the highest percentage of a-verses in all four categories. In the era of *Maldon*, all realizations of the Sxs foot had greater complexity and types that contained this foot were more strongly attracted to the a-verse.

The *Beowulf* poet realizes the Sxxs foot with a variety of word groups in long type B variants.

- | | | |
|------|---|------------------|
| (21) | (a) <i>on / fēonda gewæld</i> (Beo 808a)
'into the power of foes' | x/Sx:x-s (136X) |
| | (b) <i>was þæt / gifede tō swið</i> (Beo 3085b)
'that fate was too strong' | xx/Sx:x:s (18X) |
| | (c) <i>gē wið / fēond gē wið frēond</i> (Beo 1864a)
'both with friends and against foes' | xx/S:x:x:s (6X) |
| | (d) <i>swylc / Æschere was</i> (Beo 1329b)
'such was Æschere' | xx/Sxx:s (6X) |
| | (e) <i>Hē / bēot ne ālēh</i> (Beo 80a)
'he did not forget his boast' | x/S:x:x-s (3X) |
| | (f) <i>ower / feor oððe nēah</i> (Beo 2870a)
'either far or near' | xx/S:xx:s (3X) |
| | (g) <i>ðy̆ hē þone / fēond ofercwōm</i> (Beo 1273a)
'therefore he overcame the foe' | xxxx/S:xx-s (1X) |

The variants with highest frequency are like (21a), in which the Sx:x-s word group imitates the structure of compounds like *sibbe-gedriht*. The variant with the next highest frequency, represented by (21b), also has an Sx word as the first constituent of the group but realizes the second x position as an independent unstressed word. Next in frequency are variants like (21c), a four-word realization of the Sxxs foot, and (21d), which realizes the first three positions of the foot as an Sxx word or an Ssx compound name with weakened secondary stress. In (21e), the foot is realized as an S:x word group followed by a monosyllabic word with a prefixal negative. Finally, there are a few instances with the internal xx sequence of the foot realized as a disyllabic function word (21f) or a disyllabic prefix (21g).

Table 7 provides counts for verses like (21a–g) in all the poems surveyed.

Every poem shows highest frequency for the variant represented by item (21a). Throughout the Old English period, the Sx:x-s word group was preferred to all others as the best substitute for an Sxxs compound. *Elene* and *Brunanburh* follow *Beowulf* in employing variants like (21b) with the second-highest frequency. *Maldon* stands apart in several ways that look toward Middle English alliterative meter. The Sxxs foot, with its long dip, has become more useful by the late Old English period. The 35 total instances for *Maldon* would correspond to 350 instances in *Beowulf*, but we find only 173. The frequency rise is particularly large for more complex variants like (21c–g). A total of 12 for these in *Maldon* would correspond to

Table 4.7 *Dips in the Sxxs Foot of Long Type B*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
21a (Sx:x-s)	136 (79%)	76 (75%)	2 (67%)	15 (94%)	16 (46%)
21b (Sx:x:s)	18 (10%)	12 (12%)	1 (33%)	1 (6%)	7 (20%)
21c (S:x:x:s)	6 (3%)	5 (5%)	none	none	none
21d (Sxx:s)	6 (3%)	2 (1%)	none	none	10 (29%)
21e (S:x:x-s)	3 (2%)	none	none	none	1 (3%)
21f (S:xx:s)	3 (2%)	6 (6%)	none	none	1 (3%)
21g (S:xx-s)	1 (1%)	none	none	none	none
total	173	101	3	16	35

Table 4.8 *Frequencies for A-Verse Dips in the Sxxs Foot of Long Type B*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
Sx:x-s	46:90 (34%)	23:53 (30%)	1:1 (50%)	2:13 (13%)	5:11 (31%)
Sx:x:s	3:15 (17%)	4:8 (33%)	0:1 (0%)	0:1 (0%)	4:3 (57%)
S:x:x:s	2:4 (33%)	1:4 (20%)	none	none	none
Sxx:s	0:6 (0%)	0:2 (0%)	none	none	9:1 (90%)
S:x:x-s	2:1 (67%)	none	none	none	0:1 (0%)
S:xx:s	2:1 (67%)	2:3 (40%)	none	none	1:0 (100%)
S:xx-s	0:1 (0%)	none	none	none	none

120 in *Beowulf*, but there are only 19. As with anacrusis and medial dips, constraints on foot-internal dips were being relaxed in the late Old English period.

Table 4.8 shows the distribution of a-verses and b-verses for the realizations surveyed in Table 4.7, with the percentage of a-verses in parentheses.

Maldon shows a traditional frequency of a-verses for the preferred variant and elevated a-verse frequencies for all others except S:x:x-s, which occurs once in a b-verse. Like the Sxs foot, the Sxxs foot had increased in complexity, creating a stronger attraction to the a-verse.

In heavy Db and Dbx variants, which have great inherent complexity, the poet works harder to realize the second foot as a compound word. Item (22) provides verse counts for variants with an Sxs foot.

Table 4.9 *Dips in the Sxs Foot of Type Db*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
Sxs	56 (31%)	8 (18%)	3 (60%)	4 (67%)	2 (13%)
Sx:s	88 (49%)	29 (64%)	1 (20%)	2 (33%)	8 (50%)
S:x-s	33 (19%)	7 (16%)	1 (20%)	none	6 (38%)
S:x:s	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	none	none	none
total	178	45	5	6	16

- (22) (a) *hār / hilderinc* (Beo 1307a) S/Sxs (56X)
 ‘old battle-warrior’
 (b) *sweord / swāte fāh* (Beo 1286a) S/Sx:s (88X)
 ‘sword stained with blood’
 (c) *Fyrst / forð gewāt* (Beo 210a) S/S:x-s (33X)
 ‘the time went forth’
 (d) *līcað / leng swā wēl* (Beo 1854a) Sx/S:x:s (1X)
 ‘pleases the longer the better’

For type B variants with an Sxs foot, the frequency of direct realizations is 8 percent (see Table 4.5). For the Db variants in item (22), the frequency rises to 31 percent (56/178).

Table 4.9 compares the verse counts from *Beowulf* with counts from the other poems surveyed.

Like *Beowulf*, *Brunanburh* and *Judith* show a significantly enhanced frequency of direct Sxs realizations in the inherently complex Db and Dbx patterns (compare Table 4.5). The enhancement is less striking in *Elene*, with Sxs realizations barely ahead of S:x-s realizations. In *Maldon*, direct Sxs realizations fall well behind S:x-s realizations. *Maldon*’s frequency of direct realizations is even lower in type B, however, with 3 instances out of 102 (3 percent) as compared with 2 out of 16 in the Db variants (13 percent). The *Maldon* poet realized the Sxs foot as a compound more often in type Db, but direct realization of this foot had become more difficult to achieve in all verse types.

It was especially difficult to construct verses with an Sxxs foot realized as a compound word. Most instances occur in long type Db, which appears only twenty times in *Beowulf* (including a unique instance of expanded long Db). The inherent complexity of long type Db promotes realization of its compound foot in the simplest possible way.

- (23) (a) *sēon / sibbegedriht* (Beo 387a; cf. 729a) S/Sxxs (4X)
 ‘to see the kindred band’
 (b) *seah / (on) enta geweorc* (Beo 2717b; cf. 2774a)
 ‘looked on the giant-work’
 (c) *Wīg / ealle fornam* (Beo 1080b) S/Sx:x-s (15X)
 ‘war took away all’
 (d) *hond / sweng ne ofīeah* (Beo 1520b) S/S:x:x-s (1X)
 ‘the hand did not withhold the stroke’

The four instances like (23a) include two with the compound *entageweorc*, which refers to a prehistoric kind of “cyclopean” stone construction. This is usually printed as a word group, as in (23b), but lack of alliteration on *enta* in this verse shows that the following constituent had undergone subordination. Interpreted as a genitive compound, *entageweorc* has the expected semantic structure.²³ Direct realization of the Sxxs foot has a frequency of 20 percent in long type Db (4/20), as compared with less than 1 percent in long type B (1/174).

Table 4.10 adds counts for verses like (23a–d) in the other poems sampled, adding one realization not present in *Beowulf*.

Elene has only the variant most common in *Beowulf*. There are no long Db variants at all in *Brunanburh* or *Judith*. In *Maldon*, the two such variants add additional elements of complexity.

- (24) (a) *bæd / (þæt) beorna gehwylc* (Mald 257a) S/(x)Sx:x-s
 ‘bade that each man (should)’
 (b) *(ā)hƿfan / landes tō fela* (Mald 90a) (x)Sx/Sx:x:s
 ‘allow too much land’
 (c) *oncȳð / eorla gehwæm* (Beo 1420a) Sx/Sx:x-s
 ‘grief to each earl’

Item (24a) adds the complexity of an extrametrical word before the second foot. Only two of the twenty instances in *Beowulf* have an extrametrical word in this position (2367a and 2717a). If this complex variant had the

Table 4.10 *Dips in the Sxxs Foot of Long Type Db*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
Sxxs	4 (20%)	none	none	none	none
Sx:x-s	15 (75%)	8 (100%)	none	none	1 (50%)
S:x:x-s	1 (5%)	none	none	none	none
Sx:x:s	none	none	none	none	1 (50%)
total	20	8	none	none	2

same frequency in both poems, we would expect ten instances in *Beowulf*. In addition to its complex realization of the Sxxs foot, item (24b) adds other kinds of complexity. This variant has the pattern Sx/Sxxs, expanded long Db. A single variant in *Maldon* would correspond to ten instances in *Beowulf* but (24c) is the only such variant in the early poem. The *Maldon* variant also adds the complexity of anacrusis. The variants in the last two lines of Table 4.10 are the only ones that have independent function words in the foot-internal dip and do not imitate the structure of an Sxxs compound. Given one such variant in *Maldon*, we would expect about ten in *Beowulf*. The later poet exploits foot-internal dips more heavily in all verse types as locations for unstressed function words.

4.10 Evolution of Dips that Include Light Feet

Initial dips in types A3, B, and C contained light feet and had level-3 prominence. The number of extrametrical syllables was not strictly regulated in these dips and they stood ready to accommodate more function words. *Maldon* has an unusually high frequency of level-3 dips with more than three syllables.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|-----------|
| (25) | (a) | <i>Ne sceolon mē on þære / þēode</i> (Mald 220a) | (type A3) |
| | | ‘in that district they will not (need to rebuke) me’ | |
| | (b) | <i>ā hwīle þe hē / wēpen mæge</i> (Mald 235b) | (type B) |
| | | ‘while he may (hold) weapons’ | |
| | (c) | <i>Ne þurfon mē embe / Stūrmere</i> (Mald 249a) | (type C) |
| | | ‘around Sturmere they will not need (to rebuke me)’ | |

I scan these variants with an initial xx foot because the most prominent word in the dip has two syllables. The initial dip has seven syllables in (25a), five syllables in (25b), and six syllables in (25c).

Table 4.11 provides counts for initial dips with four or more syllables.

Maldon holds the record for the longest initial dip in types A3 and C. In type B, *Maldon*’s two initial dips with five syllables would correspond to twenty in *Beowulf* rather than the six actually attested. There are no apparent increases in frequency for *Elene*, *Brunanburh*, or *Judith*. Here as elsewhere we observe a sudden increase in the frequency of unstressed function words soon after catastrophic damage to the inflectional system.

4.11 Evolution of Verb Placement in the Poetic Line

Prehistoric SOV word order had become less regular in the era of *Beowulf* and its frequency continued to diminish as an SVO norm evolved. By the

Table 4.11 *Long Initial Dips that Include Light Feet*

	Beowulf	Elene	Brunanburh	Judith	Maldon
<i>Type A3</i>					
4 syllables	127	48	2	10	24
5 syllables	47	12	1	1	20
6 syllables	6	none	none	none	2
7 syllables	none	none	none	none	1
<i>Type B</i>					
4 syllables	39	4	none	3	4
5 syllables	6	none	none	none	2
<i>Type C</i>					
4 syllables	41	1	1	1	7
5 syllables	2	1	none	none	2
6 syllables	none	none	none	none	1

time of *Maldon*, we would expect verbs to appear less often verse-finally. Distinctions among Old English inflectional vowels had been lost a few decades before the events described in *Maldon* (section 4.4). The functions performed by inflections had to be clarified by other means. One was increasingly strict SVO order, which replaced case inflections as a way of distinguishing subjects from objects. In this section we will see how placement of finite verbs changed over time in Old English poetry.

Finite forms of *wesan* ‘to be’ provide a wealth of evidence for the prominence hierarchy (levels 1–6). The kind of lift or dip occupied by the finite verb and its level of prominence are provided to the right.

- (26) (a) *Hwæt / syndon gē* (Beo 237a) Dominant lift (1)
 ‘what are you?’
 (b) *sēlest / wære* (Beo 173b) Subordinate lift (2)
 ‘would be best’
 (c) *wæron / æþelingas* (Beo 1804a) Light foot (3)
 ‘the noblemen were (eager)’
 (d) *sweord was / swātig* (Beo 1569a) Foot-internal dip (4)
 ‘the sword was bloody’
 (e) *Yrre / (wæron) bēgen* (Beo 769b) Extrametrical dip (5)
 ‘both were angry’

The low prominence of *wesan* makes its finite forms quite unsuitable for employment on the dominant lift. Item (26a) is the only example in *Beowulf*. In accord with the rule of precedence (section 4.2), the lift

following *syndon* is occupied by a weakly stressed word rather than by a fully stressed noun or adjective. The weakly stressed word in this case is *gē*, a pronoun that occupies a level-2 lift with phrase-final stress. The suppletive form *syndon* has rather low frequency, appearing just five times in the poem, and is more prominent than *wæs* or *wæron*, forms of extremely high frequency that derive from the same root as *wesan*. In (26b), *wære* acquires phrase-final stress and is well suited to the verse-final lift. This special stress is also detectable in Modern English, where it prevents contraction. We normally say *she's here* in spoken English, for example, but always *here she is* rather than **here she's*.

Finite forms of *wesan* occupy a subordinate lift 103 times in *Beowulf*. In item (26c), such a form occupies a level-three dip as a light foot. This verb has remarkably high frequency in level-three dips, with a total of 241 instances in the poem. No other verb in *Beowulf* has higher frequency at level 3 than at level 2, on a subordinate lift. Though less prominent than any other verb, *wesan* is more prominent than prefixes or independent function words like pronouns. As we drop to level 4, the level of foot-internal dips, occupation of such dips by finite *wesan* drops off sharply. There are twenty-nine instances like (26d), with finite *wesan* on an x position inside the foot. Only nine verses are like (26e), with finite *wesan* on an extrametrical position in the medial dip (at level 5). The *Beowulf* poet never places any kind of verb in anacrusis (at level 6).

Table 4.12 provides frequencies for finite *wesan* in all the poems surveyed.

All the poems employ finite *wesan* freely in level-3 dips, though the frequency is significantly lower for *Elene* than for *Beowulf*. *Judith* and *Maldon* have lower frequencies for verse-final placement (at level 2) and higher frequencies at level 4. The instances on the dominant lift in *Judith* and *Maldon* (at level 1) deserve special attention.

Table 4.12 *Placement of Finite Wesan*

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	total
<i>Beo</i>	1 (< 1%)	106 (27%)	241 (62%)	29 (8%)	9 (2%)	386
<i>El</i>	1 (1%)	83 (43%)	93 (48%)	16 (8%)	none	193
<i>Bru</i>	none	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	none	none	2
<i>Jud</i>	1 (4%)	6 (21%)	16 (57%)	4 (14%)	1 (4%)	28
<i>Mald</i>	1 (3%)	6 (20%)	19 (63%)	4 (13%)	none	30

- (27) (a) *wǣron æt somne* (Jud 255b) Sx/(x)Sx
 ‘were together’
 (b) (*þæt*) *wǣre* / (*hit ūre*) *hlāford* (Mald 240b) (x)Sx/(xxx)Sx
 ‘that it was our lord’

Since the only comparable verse in *Beowulf* is (26a), (27a–b) represent a tenfold increase in frequency for the late poems. It is worth adding that *wǣre* and *wǣron* are high-frequency forms from the same root as *wesan*, unlike the suppletive form *syndon* that alliterates in *Beowulf*. Other unusual features of (27b) include a subordinating conjunction in anacrusis (*þæt*) and extension of the medial dip with three extrametrical syllables (*hit ūre*).

To double-check trends in Table 4.12, we need verbs more resistant to unstressed usage than *wesan* and we need to cast our net rather widely. The data set for this task includes all finite verbs that occupy a dip of any kind, even once, in any of the poems surveyed, and also occupy a lift at least once.²⁴

The closest grammatical relatives of Modern English *be* are auxiliary verbs like *may*, *can*, *will*, *shall*, *do*, and *have*. Though not as common as *be*, these auxiliaries are more common than main verbs and have lower prominence. Low prominence makes auxiliaries eligible for contraction with *not*. The form *isn’t* is paralleled by *mayn’t*, *can’t*, *won’t*, *shan’t*, *don’t* and *haven’t*. The verb *want* can be recognized as a main verb in part because it has no contracted form like **wantn’t*. Old English ancestors of our modern auxiliaries are *magan*, *cunnan*, *sculan*, *willan*, *don*, and *habban*. Like its modern descendant *have*, *habban* can be used as a main verb with the meaning “possess.” Use as a main verb is also possible for Old English *magan* (“have power”), *cunnan* (“know”), *willan* (“want”), and *don* (“put on, behave”). Such main-verb usages will be treated separately.

Placement of auxiliaries in *Beowulf* is similar to placement of finite *wesan* except that instances on the subordinate lift (at level 2) outnumber instances serving as light feet (at level 3). The greater prominence of auxiliaries makes them slightly less suitable than *wesan* as occupants of x positions. Table 4.13 tallies all instances of finite auxiliaries from the poems surveyed. Percentages refer to totals at the right. The count includes both prefixed and unprefixed forms of these verbs. For the quasi-auxiliaries *weorðan*, *lætan*, *mōtan*, and *onginnan*, see Table 4.14.

Frequencies for verse-final placement decline from *Beowulf* to *Maldon* and frequencies for earlier placement rise. *Judith* trends away from *Elene* towards *Maldon*. *Maldon* places finite auxiliaries most freely in positions

Table 4.13 *Placement of Finite Auxiliaries*

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	total
<i>magan</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	4 (5%)	60 (73%)	19 (23%)	none	none	83
<i>El</i>	none	15 (52%)	14 (48%)	none	none	29
<i>Jud</i>	none	6 (67%)	3 (33%)	none	none	9
<i>Mald</i>	none	none	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	none	11
<i>cunman</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	none	5 (100%)	none	none	none	5
<i>El</i>	none	9 (100%)	none	none	none	9
<i>sculan</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	none	55 (65%)	28 (33%)	1 (1%)	none	84
<i>El</i>	none	13 (72%)	5 (28%)	none	none	18
<i>Jud</i>	none	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	none	none	3
<i>Mald</i>	none	4 (33%)	6 (50%)	2 (17%)	none	12
<i>willan</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	none	55 (65%)	17 (33%)	none	none	72
<i>El</i>	1 (7%)	9 (60%)	5 (33%)	none	none	15
<i>Jud</i>	none	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	none	none	4
<i>Mald</i>	none	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	none	none	20
<i>don</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	1 (7%)	13 (87%)	1 (7%)	none	none	15
<i>El</i>	1 (100%)	none	none	none	none	1
<i>Jud</i>	none	none	1 (100%)	none	none	1
<i>Mald</i>	none	none	1 (100%)	none	none	1
<i>habban</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	none	25 (54%)	21 (46%)	none	none	46
<i>El</i>	none	9 (82%)	2 (18%)	none	none	11
<i>Jud</i>	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	none	none	7
<i>Mald</i>	none	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	none	none	4
<i>totals</i>						
<i>Beo</i>	5 (2%)	213 (70%)	86 (28%)	1 (<1%)	none	305
<i>El</i>	2 (2%)	55 (66%)	26 (31%)	none	none	83
<i>Jud</i>	1 (4%)	13 (54%)	10 (42%)	none	none	24
<i>Mald</i>	none	19 (40%)	27 (56%)	2 (4%)	none	48

Table 4.14 *Placement of Light Main Verbs and Quasi-Auxiliaries*

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	total
1. Quasi-auxiliary						
<i>Beo</i>	9 (8%)	91 (76%)	18 (15%)	none	none	118
<i>El</i>	none	62 (78%)	17 (22%)	none	none	79
<i>Bru</i>	none	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	none	none	5
<i>Jud</i>	none	9 (47%)	10 (53%)	none	none	19
<i>Mald</i>	1 (3%)	13 (38%)	17 (50%)	3 (9%)	none	34
2. Speech						
<i>Beo</i>	14 (14%)	61 (61%)	25 (25%)	none	none	100
<i>El</i>	4 (8%)	31 (58%)	18 (34%)	none	none	53
<i>Brun</i>	1 (100%)	none	none	none	none	1
<i>Jud</i>	none	9 (64%)	5 (36%)	none	none	14
<i>Mald</i>	1 (3%)	16 (59%)	10 (37%)	2 (7%)	none	29
3. Control						
<i>Beo</i>	9 (4%)	182 (84%)	25 (12%)	none	none	216
<i>El</i>	6 (11%)	35 (66%)	12 (23%)	none	none	53
<i>Brun</i>	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	none	none	none	4
<i>Jud</i>	2 (10%)	4 (19%)	15 (71%)	none	none	21
<i>Mald</i>	3 (14%)	15 (68%)	5 (23%)	none	none	23
4. Space/Time						
<i>Beo</i>	23 (10%)	183 (76%)	36 (15%)	none	none	242
<i>El</i>	8 (21%)	20 (53%)	10 (26%)	none	none	38
<i>Brun</i>	none	7 (78%)	2 (22%)	none	none	9
<i>Jud</i>	1 (4%)	16 (59%)	10 (37%)	none	none	27
<i>Mald</i>	5 (13%)	23 (59%)	8 (21%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	39
5. Mental Life						
<i>Beo</i>	24 (19%)	80 (63%)	23 (18%)	none	none	127
<i>El</i>	9 (16%)	45 (79%)	3 (5%)	none	none	57
<i>Jud</i>	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)	none	none	6
<i>Mald</i>	3 (21%)	7 (50%)	4 (29%)	none	none	14
totals						
<i>Beo</i>	79 (10%)	597 (74%)	127 (16%)	1 (<1%)	none	804
<i>El</i>	27 (10%)	193 (69%)	60 (21%)	none	none	280
<i>Brun</i>	2 (11%)	13 (68%)	4 (21%)	none	none	19
<i>Jud</i>	5 (6%)	39 (45%)	43 (49%)	none	none	87
<i>Mald</i>	13 (9%)	74 (54%)	44 (32%)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	137

normally occupied by inflectional endings or prefixes, with a pair of instances in a foot-internal dip (at level 4), as compared with a single instance in *Beowulf*. If these unusual verses had the same frequency in both poems, we would expect twenty instances in *Beowulf*.

Other finite verbs that occupy a dip more than once in our sample have high frequency in Old English and fall for the most part into a few natural categories. Parenthesized counts show the proportion of stressed to unstressed usages in the poems surveyed.

- 1 Finite forms of **quasi-auxiliaries**: *lētan* ‘cause’ (25:17), *mōtan* ‘be allowed’ (45:7), *onginnan* ‘begin’ (33:15), and *weorðan* ‘become’ (85:28).
- 2 Finite verbs denoting **speech acts**: *biddan* ‘ask’ (10:7), *cweðan* ‘say’ (32:9), *frignan* ‘ask’ (18:3), *secgan* ‘say’ (22:6), *sprecan* ‘speak’ (20:3), and *hātan* ‘order’ (35:30).
- 3 Finite verbs denoting acquisition of **control** over something, exercise of that control, transfer of it, or lack of it: *āgan* ‘own’ (8:11), *beran* ‘carry’ (37:2), main-verb *dōn* ‘put’ (5:3), *findan* ‘find’ (31:3), *giefan* ‘give’ (33:7), main-verb *habban* ‘possess’ (30:10), *niman* ‘take’ (36:5), *scieppan* ‘create’ (1:2), *sellan* ‘hand over’ (27:3), *sendan* ‘send’ (14:2), *slēan* ‘strike’ (14:2), and *þurfan* ‘need’ (19:5).
- 4 Finite verbs locating an entity in **space/time** (as with the dative case) or tracking movement through space/time (as with the accusative case). These include finite forms of *bīdan* ‘abide’ (23:2), *cuman* ‘come’ (54:16), *feallan* ‘fall’ (14:2), *gān* ‘go’ (44:18), *gewītan* ‘go’ (23:14), *hlēapan* ‘leap’ (1:2), *hweorfan* ‘turn’ (17:3), *licgan* ‘lie’ (25:5), *sittan* ‘sit’ (28:2), *standan* ‘stand’ (35:3), and *steppan* ‘step’ (12:2).
- 5 Finite verbs of **mental life**. These include finite forms of main-verb *cunnan* ‘know’ (25:2), *hycgan* ‘have in mind’ (7:2), *hýran* ‘hear’ (30:7), *sēon* ‘see’ (38:7), *wēnan* ‘expect’ (20:3), *witan* ‘know’ (28:5), *þencan* ‘think’ (10:3), and *þyncan* ‘seem’ (13:4).

Table 4.14 shows the placement of verbs in categories 1–5, following the model of Table 4.13. The counts include prefixed and unprefixed forms.

Verbs in categories 1–5 occupy verse-final position with lower frequency in the two late poems. *Maldon* is remarkable for its employment of these verbs in foot-internal dips and as extrametrical syllables (at levels 4 and 5). The six examples in *Maldon* would correspond to sixty in *Beowulf*, but what we actually find is a single example. On Table 4.12, *Maldon* shows the highest frequency for auxiliaries on level-three positions and the lowest frequency for auxiliaries on level-two positions. On Table 4.13, however, *Judith* shows the most

Table 4.15 *Placement of the Remaining Finite Verbs*

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	total
<i>Beo</i>	33 (21%)	113 (73%)	8 (5%)	none	none	154
<i>El</i>	5 (13%)	34 (85%)	1 (3%)	none	none	40
<i>Brun</i>	none	3 (100%)	none	none	none	3
<i>Jud</i>	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	4 (33%)	none	none	12
<i>Mald</i>	none	11 (85%)	2 (15%)	none	none	13

innovative frequencies for verbs in these positions, with *Maldon* in second place. The two late poets both innovate in response to language change but somewhat differently.

Table 4.15 provides frequencies for all remaining verbs in the data set, most of which occur just once in a dip: *alecgan* ‘lay down’ (6:1), *cēosan* ‘choose’ (6:1), *cierran* ‘turn’ (2:1), *drincan* ‘drink’ (2:1), *fōn* ‘grasp’ (25:1), *gielðan* ‘yield’ (12:1), *healdan* ‘hold’ (48:1), *hliehhan* ‘laugh’ (2:1), *munan* ‘remember’ (24:2), *myntan* ‘think’ (2:1), *sēcan* ‘seek’ (42:1), *settan* ‘set’ (11:1), *unnan* ‘grant’ (6:1), and *wrecan* ‘avenge’ (19:1).

Though somewhat more prominent than the verbs in Table 4.14, as indicated by their level-1 frequencies, most of these verbs belong to the same natural categories and might have been acceptable in the dip for that reason. To the *control* category we might add *alecgan*, *cēosan*, *fōn*, *gielðan*, *healdan*, *sēcan*, *settan*, and *unnan*. Obvious additions to the *mental life* category are *munan* and *myntan*. The verbs *hliehhan* and *wrecan* are harder to distinguish from verbs that never appear in any kind of dip, which include the vast majority of main verbs.

Judith has the most innovative frequencies in Table 4.15. *Maldon* differs less sharply from *Beowulf* or *Elene*, though it has a somewhat higher frequency of unstressed usages. Although *Maldon* innovates most ambitiously in the least prominent metrical positions (at levels 4 and 5), *Judith* leads the way with the most prominent verbs. *Maldon* and *Judith* seem to represent distinct *metrical dialects*.²⁵ Such dialects result from discovery by individual poets of departures from norms acceptable to their audiences.

4.12 Evolution of Alliterative Patterns

In *Beowulf*, finite verbs sometimes alliterate alone before a prominently stressed word, violating Sievers’s law of precedence, but primarily when the

verb is the first stressed word in its clause.²⁶ There are only two violations when the verb is clause-medial, with a stressed word of the same clause situated in a preceding verse.²⁷

- (28) (a) *l̥ēteð hworfan* (Beo 1728b) Sx/Sx
 ‘lets wander’
 (b) *wunode mid Finne* (Beo 1128b) Sx/(x)Sx
 ‘dwelt with Finn’

In (28a), the weakly stressed quasi-auxiliary *l̥ēteð* alliterates before *hworfan*, a more prominently stressed infinitive. In (28b), a main verb alliterates before the more prominent object of a preposition. In these unusual cases, the poet uses modern word orders to obtain the required alliteration. Similar verses occur in *Judith* and *Maldon*.

- (29) (a) *þōhton tilian* (Jud 208b) Sx/Sx
 ‘thought to supply’
 (b) *drencte mid wine* (Jud 29b; cf. 72b) Sx/(x)Sx
 ‘drenched with wine’
 (c) *hogode tō wige* (Mald 128b) Sx/(x)Sx
 ‘attended to warfare’
 (d) *hē lēt him þā of handon* (Mald 7a) (x)S:x/(xx)Sx
 ‘he let (a spear fly) then from his hands’
 (e) *hē gehlēop þone eoh* (Mald 189a) xx/S:xx:s
 ‘he mounted the horse’

Items (29a–b) from *Judith* are close syntactic parallels of (28a–b). Item (29c) from *Maldon* parallels (28b) and (29b). Like item (28a), (29d) has single alliteration on a finite form of *l̥ētan*. Item (29e) translates word-for-word into modern English. Its SVO word order is achieved at the cost of pronominal anacrusis and alliteration on a clause-medial finite verb before a more prominent non-alliterating object. As examples (28a–b) show, the *Beowulf* poet could use modern word order to satisfy alliterative requirements. The later poets do so much more frequently, however. To the two instances in *Judith* we can add a third and even more innovative example: item (30b), discussed below. Given three instances in each of the late poems, we would expect about thirty in *Beowulf* rather than the single instance actually found.

Compounds normally alliterate in *Beowulf*. Only one verse in the poem has a non-alliterating compound after an alliterating finite verb: item (23b), repeated as (30a).

- (30) (a) *seah on entageweorc* (Beo 2717b) S/(x)Sxxs
 (b) *salowigpāda sang hildelēoð* (Jud 211) Sx/Sx // S/Sxs
 ‘the dark-coated (raven) sang a war-song’

The finite verb *seah* stands at the beginning of its clause in (30a). Alliteration on such a verb, though unusual, would not be unprecedented. On the other hand, the alliterating verb is altogether remarkable in (30b), a one-line sentence from *Judith* with SVO word order.²⁸ Here the verb stands in medial position, as in modern English, with the subject in the a-verse. Quite apart from its unusual alliteration, item (30b) has no syntactic parallel in *Beowulf*. There are no one-line clauses in *Beowulf* with a noun subject in the a-verse, the main verb in the b-verse, and a noun object following the verb. Absence of alliteration on the compound *hildelēoð* adds yet another unusual feature. SVO word order prevails in (30b) even though the result is spectacularly non-traditional. Such lines highlight the power of the innovating word order, providing linguistic evidence unobtainable from prose texts.

As Old English evolved into Middle English, the old intuitive guides to alliterative patterning became less and less helpful. In the era of SOV Germanic, when the final stress of grammatical constructions was weakest, poets were unlikely to forget that alliteration must occur on the first lift of each verse and must be avoided at the end of the line. When SVO order became common, the last stress of a grammatical construction was often the strongest one and alliterative patterns began to seem counterintuitive. As a poetic universal, the link between stress and alliteration would remain in force throughout the transition to SVO syntax. A line-final word would look more and more often as if it ought to alliterate. By the late Middle English period, alliteration on the line-final lift had become an acceptable departure from an archaic norm.²⁹

In *Beowulf* there is only one clear case of alliteration on a forbidden lift, item (31a).

- | | | |
|------|---|--------------|
| (31) | (a) <i>þæt ic mid sweorde ofslōh</i> (Beo 574b) | xxx/Sx:x-s |
| | ‘that I slew with the sword’ | |
| | (b) <i>hyre tōgēanes gān</i> (Jud 149b) | xxx/Sx:s |
| | ‘go towards her’ | |
| | (c) <i>gifena in ðȳs ginnan grunde</i> (Jud 2a) | Sx/(xx)Sx/Sx |
| | ‘of gifts in this wide earth’ | |
| | (d) <i>sēmen snelle</i> (Mald 29b) | Ss/Sx |
| | ‘bold sailors’ | |
| | (e) <i>hwæt þis folc segeð</i> (Mald 45b) | xxx/Sx |
| | ‘what this troop says’ | |
| | (f) <i>sē wæs hāten Wulfstān</i> (Mald 75b) | xxxx/Ss |
| | ‘who was called Wulfstan’ | |
| | (g) <i>Offa forhēawen</i> (Mald 288b) | xxx/Sx |
| | ‘Offa hewn down’ | |

A handful of other apparent instances in *Beowulf* can be eliminated by “fairly certain emendation.”³⁰ Item (31b) from *Judith* is a similar instance with alliteration at the end of the *line*. Item (31c) is another non-traditional instance from *Judith* with alliteration on the last word of a hypermetrical a-verse. Items (31b–c) cannot be attributed to the sound change that differentiated palatal and velar *g*. Alliteration between these sounds is necessary for normal scansion elsewhere in *Judith*.³¹ *Maldon* provides another instance of double alliteration in the b-verse (31d). These instances from the late poems represent a tenfold increase in frequency relative to *Beowulf*.³² In (31e–g), the only alliteration occurs in the second of two prominently stressed words. These variants would be unacceptable as b-verses in *Beowulf* and equally unacceptable as a-verses. Given four instances of alliteration on a forbidden lift in *Maldon*, we would expect forty instances in *Beowulf* rather than a single instance. Here as elsewhere important trends will be missed if we simply count variants of a kind unattested in *Beowulf*. Trends toward Middle English meter show up best as changes in frequency, typically by an order of magnitude. Tracking frequencies also helps us deal with the power of formulaic conventions that resist language change. Such conventions perpetuate archaisms but with decreasing frequency over time.

Finite verbs of motion sometimes occupy a level-3 dip in *Beowulf*, but never when they alliterate. A remarkable exception appears in *Judith*.

- (32) *gewitan him wērigferhðe* (Jud 29ob) (x)xx//Sx/Sx
 ‘went away, weary in mind’

Item (32) must be a hypermetrical b-verse with the embedded type A1 verse realized as a compound. Normal scansion is possible only if alliterating *-witan* occupies the dip. If *-witan* were assigned to a lift (with obligatory resolution), the result would be (x)Sx//Sx/Sx, a hypermetrical pattern restricted to the a-verse. As SOV syntactic analogues for alliterative patterns were marginalized and traditional rules lost their link to intuition, such anomalies were likely to arise.

In *Beowulf*, word-initial *sp-*, *st-*, and *sc-* alliterate as clusters, with both consonants matching. Other kinds of cluster *alliteration* appear in late Old English poems, especially when the cluster begins with *s*.³³ Such a development would be expected as longer dips between alliterating syllables incorporated more words of intermediate *prominence*, words that sometimes alliterated. Since clusters have a lower probability of accidental matching, cluster alliteration highlights lifts more effectively in a more complex metrical environment. Cluster alliteration continued to extend its range in Middle English alliterative poetry.³⁴

4.13 A Gap in the Manuscript Record During the Early Middle English Period

After *Maldon* comes a gap of more than two centuries during which French and Latin works dominated manuscript culture while native English poetry fell out of favor.³⁵ Convergent lines of evidence show that poems in strict alliterative meter were excluded from the cultural mainstream throughout the Middle English period.³⁶ Alliterative poems that entered the mainstream, from Laȝamon's *Brut* to *Piers Plowman*, did so by abandoning devices of traditional composition, with **rhyme** often replacing **alliteration** in the *Brut*, for example.³⁷ The influence of rhyme may be observable already in *Maldon*, line 271, where the half-lines are joined by perfect end-rhyme but the alliteration of *s-* with *st-* is non-traditional.³⁸ Turville-Petre argues that alliterative tradition was destroyed sometime after *Maldon* and reinvented during the later Middle English period. This hypothesis fails to explain why there are so many shared metrical features in the later poems.³⁹ The same problem confronts the hypothesis that the meter of SGGK developed out of something like Ælfric's alliterative compositions.⁴⁰

4.14 Metrical Change in Formulaic Traditions

The following chapters explain Middle English alliterative meter as the expected outcome of language change, building on a few initial assumptions.

- 1 Alliterative poets inherited a formulaic technique of composition and worked strenuously to maintain traditional rules, modifying them only when language change made archaic requirements unsustainable.
- 2 During the literary-historical gap, trends evident in late Old English meter continued in parallel with related linguistic developments.
- 3 **Universal** constraints like the **principle of closure** guided metrical evolution, ensuring at all times that alliterative poetry could be scanned by intuition at the speed of performance.
- 4 When old metrical rules were lost, new ones would be required for coherence. In accord with assumption 1, the new rules would be based on traditional norms that were still perceptible in a changed linguistic environment. Transforming these norms into rules would yield a more coherent set of verse patterns, facilitating intuitive scansion. As new rules were added, some late Old English trends might be pruned back, for example the trend toward extremely **long dips** in type C (section 4.10).

4.15 Some Rules of Middle English Alliterative Meter

At the other side of the literary-historical gap we find poems like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (SGGK). SGGK is widely admired for vivid characters and intricate patterning of narrative detail. It seems safe to choose such a poem as a representative example of strict alliterative meter.

Until a few decades ago, researchers interested in SGGK had nothing to draw on like the foundational work of Sievers and Bliss. Since the mid-1980s, however, constraints on Middle English meter have been identified and widely discussed.⁴¹ A strong consensus about rules for the b-verse has emerged, and some rules for the a-verse have been proposed in recent work.⁴² These findings are summarized in rules 1–4.

- Rule 1 The b-verse must contain one and only one **long dip** with two or three **metrical syllables**.
- Rule 2 The b-verse must contain two and only two syllables with metrically significant stress (i.e., two lifts).
- Rule 3 The b-verse must have a strictly trochaic **closure**. Its final syllable must have zero stress and the immediately preceding syllable must be stressed.
- Rule 4 The a-verse must contrast with the b-verse, for example in having two **long dips** or a non-trochaic closure. I will refer to rule 4 as the *principle of asymmetry*.⁴³

4.16 Parallel Developments in Cognate Germanic Meters

The evolution of Norse and Saxon alliterative meters can provide insight into what happened during the gap. Old Norse underwent widespread loss of unstressed syllables due to the influence of a very forceful primary stress. As a result, many verses in respected older poems were reduced to fewer than four metrical syllables.⁴⁴ Use of all such verses in *fornyrðislag*, which is much like the meter of *Beowulf*, would have created intolerable confusion about the number of feet in the verse. A short type S/Sx, for example, would have looked too much like a realization of the Ssx foot as an S:sx word group. Types that appeared to have traditional sanction were not discontinued, however. Instead they were incorporated into two new Eddic meters.⁴⁵ Short verses were accommodated in a new Eddic meter called *ljóðahátt* that employed predictable placement as an aid to intuitive scansion. In *ljóðahátt*, short verses occupied special positions in a well-defined stanzaic structure. Within a *ljóðahátt* stanza, the audience could

determine whether to interpret two words as the two **feet** of a small verse or as a realization of a compound **foot**. As English verse types became more difficult to scan, Middle English poets adopted a similar strategy, confining some verse types to the a-verse and others to the b-verse. This strategy built on traditional preferences for verse placement within the **line**.

Not every verse in prehistoric Norse poems had a linguistic structure allowing for contraction. Some verses retained their original length and were eventually too long for employment in *fornyrðislag*. For archaic long types another new meter was created: *málahátt*. Some metrists have criticized *málahátt* as an undisciplined form of *fornyrðislag*; but although more permissive in some respects, it is stricter in others.⁴⁶ In comparison with *fornyrðislag*, *málahátt* had a far higher frequency of double **alliteration** in the opening half of the **line**, distinguishing the a-verse more sharply from the b-verse and creating a more salient line pattern. In *fornyrðislag*, a **long dip** was optional in types A, B, and C. In *málahátt*, a long dip was obligatory in these types. *Málahátt* verses were more sharply delineated by their syntax, with greatly enhanced frequency of one-verse clauses. In early Old English poetry, as in *fornyrðislag*, the verse was usually realized as a noun phrase, a verb phrase, a prepositional phrase, or some other sub-constituent of a clause; and sentences that filled several verses often began or ended in the middle of the **line**. More regular alignment of clause boundaries with line boundaries is already evident in the late Old English period. The frequency of end-stopped **lines** is about twice as high in *Maldon* as in earlier narrative poems.⁴⁷ In SGGK, sentences that begin in the middle of the **line** are so rare that editors punctuate apparent instances as clauses (as for example in line 1487). One-verse clauses are much more common in SGGK than in *Beowulf*.

Another Norse metrical innovation is *dróttkvætt* ('court meter'). Like the hypermetrical a-verse in *Beowulf*, the *dróttkvætt* verse is constructed by adding a stressed word to a normal verse. In *dróttkvætt*, the added word stands at the end of the verse. This closing word must always have the trochaic pattern Sx, the optimal word pattern in Old Norse as in Old English. Since *dróttkvætt* is notoriously strict in other respects, it is not surprising that the optimal word pattern is required in the **foot** most strictly governed by the **principle of closure**. As metrical rules were lost or weakened, a fixed trochaic closure would highlight the structure of the **line** as a coherent aesthetic unit progressing from metrical tension to metrical release (cf. **section 1.12**).

Old English hypermetrical b-verses must appear in clusters. This requirement distinguishes them from type A1 b-verses with **anacrusis**

(section 3.13). Some variants in SGGK look like hypermetrical b-verses but show no tendency to cluster. For insight into the resulting problems of scansion, we can turn to Old Saxon alliterative meter, in which some hypermetrical verses were clustered and others were not. Since Old Saxon was evolving more rapidly than Old English, we would expect the Old Saxon *Heliand* to resemble Middle English poems in some respects. As we shall see in Chapter 5, SGGK and the *Heliand* use the same technique to distinguish type A1 b-verses from unclustered hypermetrical b-verses.

4.17 Major Developments in the Evolution of Middle English Meter

In following chapters we will see how Middle English poets repaired the damage inflicted on the meter by language change. We will trace the further evolution of the verse types introduced in Chapter 3, showing how each type was transformed by the consolidation of SVO syntax and by reorganization of the metrical system to create new kinds of metrical coherence. In broad outline, the evolution of Middle English meter proceeded as below.

- 1 Type A1 continued to provide the most favorable site for metrical experiments. Its simpler variants had always favored the b-verse. Increasing frequency in the b-verse, already conspicuous in *Maldon*, continued in the gap as verses of unprecedented complexity crowded the a-verse. The simpler A1 variants were largely confined to the b-verse by the fourteenth century. A long, complex A1 variant confined to the a-verse in *Beowulf*, with disyllabic anacrusis and extension of the medial dip, became the most common variant in the Middle English a-verse. A1 verses of unprecedented length appeared.
- 2 The shift of type B to the a-verse, already evident in *Maldon*, continued in the gap and went to completion. In SGGK, type B was excluded from the b-verse.
- 3 As the productivity of compounding declined, variants of type C with a word group in the Ssx foot began to look like optimal realizations. These variants had always favored the b-verse. By the fourteenth century, type C was vanishingly rare in the a-verse.
- 4 Types A2a and E were eliminated due to unsustainable constraints on function words. Strict rules for placement of the major syntactic break were no longer essential in the surviving heavy types, but these rules survived as stylistic preferences.

- 5 The a-verse had always been the preferred location for heavy types with two primary lifts followed by a secondary lift. A decline in the productivity of compounding made heavy types more difficult to scan by intuition, hence even less appropriate to the b-verse. By the fourteenth century, the surviving heavy types had been excluded from the b-verse.
- 6 Restriction of metrical patterns to the a-verse or b-verse became an attractive possibility as the system continued along late Old English trajectories. At some point during the gap, alliterative poets realized that patterns characteristic of the b-verse tended to have a trochaic verse-final word, no more than one **long dip**, and no more than two metrically significant stresses. Regularization of these tendencies compensated for loss of some traditional rules.
- 7 A decline in the productivity of compounding and a strengthening SVO norm destroyed the old system of **metrical subordination**, breaking the link between **alliterative** patterns and patterns of SOV **phrasal stress**. By the fourteenth century, the second lift in types B and C was no longer perceptibly subordinate and was **reanalyzed** as a primary lift. Marginal subtypes with a single lift were eliminated from the metrical system. These included type A₃ (xx/Sx, xx/Ss) and the lightest C subtypes (x/Sxx, xx/Sxx). All surviving verse types now had two primary lifts, and a new metrical constant had emerged.⁴⁸
- 8 Elimination of types E and A_{2a} allowed for easy identification of primary lifts in the surviving heavy verse types. These were always the first two lifts. **Alliteration** on the secondary lift was now a permissible option.⁴⁹
- 9 **Alliteration** was now obligatory on both primary lifts in all a-verses, enhancing asymmetry with the b-verse.
- 10 The SVO norm exerted very strong influence by the fourteenth century. The most **prominent** stress in a two-stress English phrase was now normally the last one rather than the first one. The **universal** relation between stress and alliteration promoted optional alliteration on the final word in the b-verse. In Old English a-verses, alliteration had acted like compound stress within heavy feet, elevating the prominence of the first stress and subordinating any prominent stress on the s position (section 3.6). After word-foot principles had been lost, the smallest metrical pattern was the verse pattern and **alliteration** acted like **phrasal stress**. Alliteration on the first two lifts subordinated the third lift, paralleling Modern English three-stress phrases in which the third stress is weakest.⁵⁰ Since phrasal stress

subordinates syllables less deeply than compound stress, a Middle English alliterative rule based on phrasal stress allowed for more alliterating syllables per verse.⁵¹

- II Lengthening of vowels in open syllables eliminated most resolvable sequences.⁵² This had no effect on the inventory of verse types. Words that were resolvable in Old English simply standardized the value they had when unresolved. Basic metrical patterns were unaffected because resolved constituents were *marked* (exceptional) in relation to long stressed syllables.⁵³ In *Beowulf*, *resolution* created marked *realizations* of patterns normally realized with long vowels.

4.18 Summary

The word-foot theory distinguishes among several kinds of x position. *Extrametrical* x positions are normally occupied by unstressed prefixes. In word feet with an S position, x positions are normally occupied by unstressed syllables of stressed words. The x positions of light word feet are normally occupied by independent *function words*. Assigning a syllable of greater than normal prominence to an x position creates a metrically significant mismatch, inhibiting placement of finite verbs and independent function words at specific locations in the poetic line.

Given the emphasis on cultural preservation in formulaic poetry, a general increase in *mismatch* is most plausibly attributed to change in the poet's language. Within the word-foot theory, the influence of a given language change is predicted to vary according to the level of metrical resistance. This prediction is fulfilled in a wide variety of cases. In the late Old English period, a strengthening SVO norm shifted finite verbs from their preferred location on a line-final lift into light verse-initial feet and, less often, into more resistant medial dips. Finite verbs were never shifted into verse-initial *anacrusis* dips, where resistance was strongest. Catastrophic damage to the inflectional system made independent *function words* more necessary and increased the average length of dips in the poetic line. As predicted, the preferred location for unusually *long dips* was verse-initially in types with a light initial foot, the location that had always been most tolerant of *extrametrical syllables*. Decline in the productivity of compounding had a significant effect on the foot patterns Sxs and Sxxs, which corresponded to compounds of restricted frequency. By the late Old

English period, the x positions in these compound feet were occupied more often by independent unstressed words. Sxs and Sxxs feet became more difficult to associate with compound words, adding **complexity** to verse types that employed them and attracting these types to the a-verse. Some **predictions** of the word-foot theory involve small numbers of examples, but there are many such predictions and the cumulative evidence trends overwhelmingly in the same direction.

Middle English Type A1 and the Hypermetrical B-Verse

5.1 Basic Principles of Scansion

Middle English type A1 can be represented as (x)Sx(x)Sx, where S is filled by a stressed syllable, x is normally filled by an unstressed syllable, and a parenthesized (x) can be filled with additional unstressed syllables.¹ Old English type A1 has similar stress patterns (section 3.4). The Middle English (x) locations are filled more often, however, and are open to a wider variety of words. The distinct character of *anacrusis*, already obscured in the era of *Maldon*, had been lost by the fourteenth century. I will refer to any unstressed material in the first (x) of Middle English type A1 as an *initial dip*. Unstressed material between the S positions, whether obligatory or optional, will be called a *medial dip*.

In Old English type A1x (Sxx/Sx), the first *foot* corresponds to a word pattern with low frequency. This type is more complex than type A1 and appears most often in the a-verse. When word-foot principles were lost, the complexity of type A1x would have been obscured because Sxx/Sx has the same stress pattern as Sx/(x)Sx, type A1 with an extrametrical syllable before the second foot. Middle English descendants of type A1x exhibit no symptoms of complexity and occur primarily in the b-verse. I will include descendants of type A1x in Middle English type A1.

The slash is removed from Middle English verse patterns because *foot* boundaries are no longer present. In the fourteenth century, verses employed metrical positions but no feet, like the Slavic decasyllable (section 1.18). Alliterative poets continued to regulate stress patterning as well as syllable count, maintaining the stress contours of Old English verse types. After word-foot structure was lost, however, verse patterns were no longer constructed from foot patterns based on patterns of *word stress*. The Middle English patterns were based on patterns of *phrasal stress* within the whole verse. Since feet were no longer employed, *extrametrical syllables* like those in *Beowulf* could not occur (cf. section 3.5). The verse had become the

smallest metrical unit above the level of the metrical position and all **metrical positions** now lay within this unit.² Every unstressed syllable in a Middle English verse occupied a metrical position and was subject to the usual rules for verse patterns. When conditions for **elision** were met, two unstressed syllables could occupy a single x position, but neither syllable was excluded from the metrical pattern in such cases. In the Middle English notations, parenthesized (x) represents an optional x position of the basic pattern, as distinct from an **extrametrical** Old English (x), which does not obey the usual rules for verse patterns and is subject to special constraints (specified in **section 3.1 under N8**).³

Middle English b-verses have one and only one **long dip**. Type A1 b-verses have the **long dip** in medial position. Otherwise similar **variants** with a long initial dip will be classified as hypermetrical b-verses.

5.2 Evolution of Middle English Type A1

Type A1 verses with four syllables were common in the Old English b-verse. As the frequency of **function words** increased, such verses declined in frequency. By the fourteenth century they were no longer acceptable.⁴

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) | (a) <i>Felix Brutus</i> (13b) | *SxSx |
| | ‘Felix Brutus’ | |
| | (b) <i>ʒern[e] to schewe</i> (1526b) | manuscript *SxSx (emended to SxxSx) |
| | ‘eagerly to show’ | |
| | (c) <i>ricchis hym swyʒe</i> (8b) | SxxSx |
| | ‘advances himself quickly’ | |
| | (d) <i>Seggez hym serued</i> (888a) | SxxSx |
| | ‘men served him’ | |

Item (1a), with two trochaic words, corresponds to the optimal realization of Old English type A1 but lacks the **long dip** that is mandatory in SGGK. Item (1b) also lacks a long dip as it stands in the manuscript. Of fifteen similar exceptions, all except (1a) can be eliminated by routine editorial improvements.⁵ The required long dip can usually be obtained by insertion of final *-e* under well-defined conditions.⁶ In (1b), for example, the bracketed final *-e* meets the requirements for insertion and the verse then has a long medial dip. Variants like (1c), with the pattern SxxSx, occur hundreds of times in SGGK but are largely restricted to the b-verse. A-verses like (1d) have very low frequency.⁷ In general, the *Gawain* poet restricts *verse-pattern overlap*, employment of the same pattern in both halves of the alliterative **line**, which contravenes the **principle of asymmetry** (**section 4.15**).

Noriko Inoue formulates a metrical law against b-verse dips with more than three *metrical syllables*.⁸ The poet has systematic procedures for avoiding such dips, which I will call *ultralong*. Inoue's law provides valuable information about the unstressed Middle English *e* that sometimes counts as syllabic and is sometimes disregarded. At the end of the b-verse, of course, the value of final *-e* is determined by the rule that requires exactly one unstressed syllable after the final stress. *Line-final -e* has unambiguous syllabic value in (1b–c).

The metrical rules are restated below, with Inoue's law added as a fifth rule.

- Rule 1 The b-verse must contain one and only one *long dip*.
- Rule 2 The b-verse must contain two and only two lifts.
- Rule 3 The b-verse must have strictly trochaic *closure*.
- Rule 4 The a-verse must contrast with the b-verse, for example in having two *long dips* or a non-trochaic closure.
- Rule 5 An *ultralong dip* with more than three syllables is permissible only in the a-verse, where it provides contrast with the b-verse.⁹

5.3 Metrical Interpretation of Manuscript < e >

Studies of Chaucer's poetry by Ten Brink and McJimsey provide important findings about the value of manuscript < e > in late Middle English.¹⁰ Two quite different problems arise with regard to interpretation of this character in suffixes and inflectional endings. The first is to distinguish manuscript < e > as a casual or artificial spelling from an < e > that could represent a metrically significant schwa vowel. A final < e > in an early Middle English word was normally realized as schwa if the Old English form of the word had an unstressed final vowel. Exceptions arose with some frequency, however, after loss of inflectional distinctions in the late Old English period led to reorganization of the inflectional system. Old English feminine nouns, for example, usually had a final unstressed vowel. In early Middle English, the less common forms without a final vowel often added syllabic *-e* by analogy with the more common forms.¹¹ Old English final vowels did not always survive as *-e* in Middle English. They were especially vulnerable to loss in imperative and present tense singular verbs.¹² Loss of syllabic *-e* was often incomplete. Forms of the same word surviving with and without this vowel provided Chaucer with some useful variants. I will adopt the term *weak e* for an unstressed schwa vowel that could be realized as a *metrical syllable*.¹³

Weak *-e* was present in **underlying forms** but was not consistently pronounced during the later Middle English period. Slippage between underlying form and pronunciation would be expected in this transitional phase between early Middle English, when weak *e* was regularly syllabic, and early Modern English, when it was lost in most phonetic environments.¹⁴ With regard to underlying form and pronunciation in poetry, see **section 1.6**. Underlying weak *e* was learned along with other features of a given word during normal language acquisition.¹⁵

A second and quite different problem is to determine how **realization** of underlying *-e* is affected by placement within the word, the phrase, and the poetic **line**. All effects of placement seem to follow from one general principle.

The **Principle of Reduction: Realization** of underlying weak *e* is inhibited in constituents with reduced **prominence**.

Non-realization is a predictable next step after reduction of late Old English inflectional vowels to schwa, which was caused by a general lowering of stress levels (**section 4.4**). Given the concentration of stress in the **root** syllable of a Germanic word, any following syllable was likely to be reduced and then lost when less energy was invested in the word as a whole. Late Middle English weak *-e* was well on the way from reduction to loss. In a word that underwent stress subordination, that further removal of energy could inhibit realization of weak *-e*, foreshadowing the Modern English pronunciation.

Prosodic variants with reduced metrical prominence include those placed in a dip by the *Gawain* poet and those placed by Chaucer on a **weak position** (the first metrical position of the iambic foot).¹⁶ Before the last foot of his iambic line, Chaucer seldom realizes weak *-e* as a **metrical syllable** in a high-frequency function word with low prominence, though the *-e* is significant in all rhyming words, which acquire phrase-final stress as well as the metrical **prominence** that **rhyme** confers.¹⁷

Weak Final -e in Function Words with Low Prominence

Relevant aspects of Chaucer's technique are paralleled in a corpus of b-verses from SGGK. These b-verses have a single scansion consistent with rules 1–5. We begin with the function words in the corpus. Unstressed function words undergo a variety of reduction processes, as for example in familiar contract forms like *don't* and *I've*. The quantifiers *all(e)* 'all' and

sum(me) ‘some’ provide representative Middle English examples with weak *-e*.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|
| (2) | (a) <i>þat al[le] desyres</i> (1257b) | *xSxSx > xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘that all desire’ | |
| | (b) <i>with al(le) þat lyf bere</i> (1229b) | *xxxxSSx > xxxSSx (type C) |
| | ‘with all that bear life’ | |
| | (c) <i>sum(me) brad on þe gledez</i> (891b) | *xxSxxSx > xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘some grilled on the coals’ | |
| | (d) <i>byfor(e) þe court alle</i> (1408b) | xxxSSx (type C) |
| | ‘before all the court’ | |

Putter and Stokes add < le > in (2a) to indicate that the weak *-e* should be scanned as a metrical syllable in a mandatory **long dip**. In (2b), the editors remove < le > from manuscript *alle* to indicate that weak *-e* should not be scanned as a metrical syllable, since that would result in an ultralong dip, violating rule 5. Interpretation of manuscript *summe* as a disyllable would create a second long dip in (2c), violating rule 1. In (2d), *alle* acquires clause-final stress and scans as Sx. Monosyllabic interpretation of *alle* in (2d) would violate rule 3. In non-final position, *alle* usually has monosyllabic value. Interpretation of *alle* as disyllabic would create additional **ultralong dips** in verses 944b, 1229b, 1372b, 1528b, 2422b, 2450b, and 2513b. In some of these verses, *al(le)* might have been intended as a singular form with no underlying *-e*. Such instances would not show the effect of diminished prominence on realization of weak *-e*. The effect of diminished prominence is easiest to observe in possessive pronouns.¹⁸ Disyllabic interpretation of *oure*, *your*, *myne*, or *thyne* is never necessary in SGGK to create the required **long dip** for a b-verse.

In this chapter and subsequently I parenthesize Middle English manuscript characters that should be disregarded in scansion. Square brackets will enclose material not present in a Middle English manuscript that must be inserted for normal scansion. In Old English verses cited for comparison, parentheses will be used for extrametrical syllables as before. The optional unstressed syllables of Middle English verses, which are not extrametrical, will not be parenthesized. As explained in section 5.1, parenthesized (x) in Middle English verse patterns notates optional syllables rather than **extrametrical** syllables.

Table 5.1 summarizes metrical values for unstressed words with high frequency in the corpus. Three categories are distinguished: b-verses employing *-e* as a metrical syllable to obtain a mandatory **long dip**, b-verses in which metrical *-e* would create an **ultralong dip**, and b-verses in which metrical *-e* would create a second **long dip**. High-frequency adverbs are included here along with function words from closed classes. All words in

Table 5.1 *Interpretation of High-Frequency Words with Weak Final -e*

	provides long dip	avoids ultralong dip	avoids two long dips
Determiners			
<i>pise</i>	654b	42b, 481b	
<i>pose</i>		495b	
<i>suche</i>	1946b		682b
Prepositions			
<i>aboute</i>	68b	184b, 621b	
<i>withoute</i>		1754b	
<i>aboue</i>		189b	
<i>bifore</i>		347b, 397b, 1408b, 1616b, 2462b, 1675b, 1693b, 2072b	
Auxiliaries			
<i>are</i>	259b	1511b	
<i>haue</i>		391b, 2344b, 2508b	2440b
<i>hade</i>		?700b, ?1135b, 1838b, 2484b	337b, 1722b, 2202b, 2480b, 2112b
<i>myȝte</i>		234b, 1568b	345b
<i>schulde</i>		1774b	371b, 559b, 1692b
<i>were</i>			144b, 656b, 744b, 1049b, 1931b
Adverbs			
<i>here</i>	1522b		
<i>where</i>	395b, 660b	1058b, 1459b	
<i>pere</i>		701b, 1342b, 1392b, 1875b, 1925b, 2084b, 2325b	875b, 1893b, 1935b, 2077b, 2078b, 2120b
<i>Penne</i>	1442b	883b	410b, 1218b

Table 5.1 have the final *-e* immediately after the root syllable. Other word patterns are reserved for separate discussion.

The *Gawain* poet realizes weak *-e* in eight instances to provide a long dip. Weak *-e* is unrealized in at least thirty-four instances to avoid an ultralong dip and in twenty-four instances to avoid two long dips. Chaucer never employs *pise* or *here* as disyllables.¹⁹ In SGGK, however, there is one example of disyllabic usage for each word. Chaucer's metrical interpretations correspond to the usual ones in SGGK but alternative interpretations are permissible in alliterative poetry. This is not surprising. In Chaucer's line, a *weak*

position is the most natural place for the unstressed root syllable of *pise* or *here*. With the root syllable on a weak position, an even less prominent final *-e* would create an extreme mismatch on the following strong position. Disyllabic forms of *pise* and *here* create problems in an iambic meter with strict constraints on syllable count. In SGGK, on the other hand, the most natural placement of these disyllabic forms can provide a useful long dip.

Given the bias toward monosyllabic usage on Table 5.1, it may seem surprising to find that a high-frequency form like *bope* scans as disyllabic in its only unambiguous occurrence, creating an obligatory long dip in item (3a).

- (3) (a) *bope pay token* (828b) SxxSx
 'they took both'
 (b) *with one bigyled* (2416b) xSxxSx
 'beguiled by one (woman)'

In this case, however, *bope* has the special prominence conferred by alliteration. In (3b), similarly, an alliterating instance of high-frequency *one* realizes its final *-e* for the long dip. When high-frequency words alliterate, realization of the final *-e* never violates rule 1 or rule 5. In SGGK, alliteration is a metrical equivalent of phrasal stress, enhancing prominence and promoting realization of weak *-e*.

Weak Final -e in Open-Class Words

In Chaucer's strict syllable-counting meters, weak final *-e* need not be realized in nouns, adjectives, or main verbs with trochaic underlying forms.²⁰ "Indeed," McJimsey remarks, "it is rare to find a word which always requires an *-e* in metrical pronunciation."²¹ In alliterative poetry, which permits optional unstressed syllables, it is much harder to identify non-realization and underlying *-e* must often be realized for proper scansion.

- (4) (a) *pe pane ful clene* (154b) xSxxSx (A1)
 'the fur edging (was) very elegant'
 (b) *and tell(e) me how þou hattes* (401b; cf. 1392b, 2284b) xSxxxSx (type A1)
 'and tell me how you are called (i.e., your name)'
 (c) *of his burpe schal sitte* (922b) *xxSxxSx
 'shall sit (and sing) about his birth'

The underlying weak *-e* of *pane* must be realized in (4a) to provide the necessary long dip. As we shall see, trochaic realizations of this kind are abundant. It is much harder to find a verse requiring monosyllabic realization of a prominent word like *pane*. The only apparent examples I could find are those specified in (4b), where a realized *-e* would create

unacceptable dips. In these verses, the disregarded *-e* is an imperative singular verb inflection, which is more vulnerable to loss than a noun or adjective inflection.²² Weak *-e* had probably been lost from a variant **underlying form** of *telle*. Realization of *-e* in the lexical noun *burpe* would create a second long dip in (4c). This verse appears in a defective line, however. Putter and Stokes move *of his burpe* to the a-verse. Disregarding weak *-e* in prominent words was not a free option for the *Gawain* poet.²³

The metrical prominence conferred by rhyme is available only at the end of Chaucer's line. In SGGK, on the other hand, linguistically prominent words normally alliterate in the interior of the verse and the **prominence** added by the **sound echo** promotes realization of underlying *-e*. At the end of the alliterative **line**, phrase-final stress enhances prominence and rule 3 mandates realization of weak *-e* in words with trochaic underlying forms. With phrase-final stress, function words acquire sufficient prominence to realize weak *-e* and provide trochaic closure.

High-Frequency Words with Weak e Followed by a Word-Final Consonant

Our test corpus contains some disyllabic **function words** with non-final *e* that have monosyllabic variants in the dip. Use of such words is summarized in **Table 5.2**.

Weak *e* is usually protected from loss by a following consonant.²⁴ In these special cases, a voiced fricative is lost inside the word and weak

Table 5.2 *Interpretation of High-Frequency Words Ending in Weak e Plus Consonant*

	provides long dip	avoids ultralong dip	avoids two long dips
Adverbs			
<i>euer</i>		1057b, 2196b, 2363b	1459b
<i>neuer</i>	869b	430b	
Prepositions			
<i>ouer</i>		957b, 1709b, 2217b	
Conjunctions that also occur as adverbs			
<i>or / oþer</i>	1109b	2108b	1772b
<i>syn / syþen</i>		2394b	1956b

e undergoes contraction when brought into contact with the preceding vowel. Words like *never*, *ever*, and *over* can have monosyllabic value in English poetry, as notated by spellings such as < ne'er >, < e'er >, and < o'er >, along with spellings like < ner > in Middle English manuscripts.²⁵ In the modern spellings, the apostrophe indicates that the voiced fricative [v] of the standard form is unrealized. A shortened form of *ever* in *wer(e)soe(ue)r*, which avoids violation of rule 5 in verse 1459b, suggests that this type of contraction could occur in alliterating syllables. Middle English *oper*, with intervocalic < þ > pronounced as the voiced fricative [ð], often reduces to its modern form *or* and can appear in SGGK where a monosyllable is required. Since *or* has become the standard form in English, it does not employ the spelling < o'er >, now reserved for the identically pronounced but non-standard contraction of *over*. Loss of [ð] followed by contraction also occurs in *syn/syþen*. The *Gawain* poet employs *syþen* primarily in the a-verse, where there are no widely accepted criteria for determining its value. In *Saint Erkenwald* 260b, however, *sythen* appears at the end of the line and is clearly disyllabic.

Middle English *vpon* and *more* alternate with monosyllabic forms that are not due to reduction. The preposition *on* had no final *-e* in Old English and *vpon* is a composite of two prepositions. Middle English *mo* descends from an Old English comparative without *-e* that was used as a neuter noun.²⁶ *Mo* is not a reduced form of *more*. Distribution of these forms is summarized below.

- A The long alternant *vpon* creates a necessary long dip in 37b, 164b, 326b, 329b, 351b, 431b, 471b, 528b, 581b, 663b, 746b, 867b (spelled *on*), 901b, 982b, 1054b, 1477b (spelled *on*), 1605b, 1854b, 2070b, 2098b, 2100b, 2119b, and 2165b. The long alternant *more* creates a necessary long dip in 1198b.
- B The short alternant *mo* avoids an **ultralong dip** in 2316b.
- C The short alternant *on* is used to avoid a second long dip in 260b, 478b, 517b, 683b, 884b, 1054b, 1143b, and 1461b. The short alternant *mo* avoids a second long dip in 1198b.

Middle English *vpon* has a higher frequency of unambiguous instances than its short alternant, contrasting sharply in this respect with the prepositions in [Tables 5.1](#) and [5.2](#). Assignment to the dip has no inhibiting effect on realization of *vpon* as a disyllable because no reduced monosyllabic form is available. Apart from the fact that one word includes the other, alternation between *vpon* and *on* resembles the use of etymologically unrelated synonyms for varying metrical requirements.

Weak *e* in Adjacent Syllables

An important group of early Middle English words had two weak *e* vowels separated by *d*, *l*, *n*, or *r*. Such words lose one of the two unstressed syllables in Chaucer's poetry. Thus *lovede* 'loved' becomes *lovde* or *lovēd*.²⁷ In SGGK, the two syllables must often reduce to one, as with Chaucer, but both syllables are sometimes realized to provide a long dip.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|------------------------|
| (5) | (a) | <i>ne sundred[e] nouper</i> (659b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | | 'and did not separate, either' | |
| | (b) | <i>þat hym iugged were</i> (1856b) | xxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | | 'that might have been ordained for him' | |
| | (c) | <i>þat longed to þe Table</i> (2515b) | xSxxxSx (type A1) |
| | | 'who belonged to the (Round) Table' | |
| | (d) | <i>waxen[e] torches</i> (1650b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | | 'torches made of wax' | |
| | (e) | <i>wrast{ele}z with þe sunne</i> (525b) | SxxxSx (type A1) |
| | | 'wrestles with the sun' | |
| | (f) | <i>when þe folk ged{ere}d</i> (1566b) | xxSSx (type C) |
| | | 'when the company gathered' | |

Putter and Stokes insert *e* in (5a) to show that both underlying syllables of the *-ede* sequence are realized, providing a long dip for the most common A1 pattern. In (5b), the scribe omits the final *e* of the underlying *-ede* sequence in *iuggede*. This manuscript verse has a well-attested hypermetrical pattern. Realization of both syllables in the *-ede* sequence would transform (5b) into an unmetrical b-verse with two long dips. The manuscript verse (5c) scans as another common type A1 variant. With full realization of the underlying *ede* sequence, (5c) would violate rule 5. Items (5d–f) provide examples with the resonant consonants *l* and *n*. In cases like (5e–f), where the full underlying sequence is spelled out in the manuscript but the meter requires a single syllable, I will use curly brackets to indicate that the sequence is reduced. This convention makes it unnecessary to specify which of the two underlying vowels is realized, a linguistic problem with no apparent relevance to our main concerns.²⁸ Item (5f) illustrates placement of *gedered* in line-final position, where reduction of the *-ere-* sequence provides the required trochaic closure.

Distribution is summarized below for the remaining variants like (5a–f) in the corpus of verses with unambiguous scansion.

- A. The full sequence is realized for a long dip in *crabbed*[e] 502b, *faȳl*[e]*d*[e] 658b, *naked*[e] 730b and 962b, *pured*[e] 912b, *enbrauded*[e] 2208b, *knorned*[e] 2166b, *ferked*[e] 2173b, and *wak*[e]*ned* 119b.

- B. The sequence is reduced to avoid violation of Inoue's law in *wonde* 701b (from underlying *wonede*), *wezed* 1403b (< *wezede*), *schewed* 1880b (< *schewede*), *spared* (< *sparede*), *wapped* 2004b (< *wappede*), *hond{ele}* 289b, and *ged{ere}s* 421b.
- C. The sequence is reduced to avoid a second long dip in *folzed* 1895b (< *folzede*), *siker* 111b (< *sikere*), *wakned* 119b (< *wakened*), *owen* 408b (< *owene*), *sadel* 437b (< *sadele*), *hazer* 1738b (< *hazere*), *festned* 1783b (< *festened*), *seuer* 1958b (< *seuere*), *sadel* 2110b (< *sadele*), *keuer* (< *keuere*), and *awen* 2301b (< *awene*).

In (5a) and (5d), Sxx realizations of *sundrede* and *waxene* supply a metrically desirable long dip. In Chaucer's iambic poetry, such realizations are never desirable. At the end of the line, an Sxx realization places a **long dip** after the last stress, which is not permitted in iambic pentameter. In other positions, alignment of the stressed syllable with a strong position would place the weak final *-e* on the following strong position, creating an extreme mismatch. Spelling tendencies make it clear that forms like *sundrede* and *waxene* were often pronounced as disyllables in ordinary speech, with one weak *e* unexpressed. This **idiomatic** realization could supply a line-final **trochee**, as in (5f). Within the line, the added prominence of alliteration made it possible to realize a second weak *e* as a metrical syllable, though the Sx interpretation predominated even in alliterating words.

Weak e in Constituents with Secondary Stress

In the interior of Chaucer's line, weak *e* was often unrealized in subordinate constituents of words, sometimes even when protected by a following consonant.²⁹ The affected constituents included the secondary elements of compounds like *másse-dāy(e)s* 'days on which mass is said' and the suffixes of Anglicized French borrowings like *árgumèntes/árgumèntz* 'arguments.' Chaucer aligns the primary stress of compounds with a **strong position**, so the element with secondary stress falls on a **weak position** in compounds with adjacent stresses like *húsbonnd(e)s* 'husband's.' Weak *e* in such words is systematically unrealized to avoid extreme mismatch with the following strong position. Ten Brink defines the secondary constituents in compounds like *húsbonnd(e)s* as (metrically) unaccented but capable of stress, classifying them together with anglicized French borrowings like *rívèr(e)s*.³⁰ Anglicized French borrowings had secondary stress on the syllable that bore primary stress in French. In non-anglicized pronunciation, that syllable could provide the stress that initiates a **rhyme**.³¹

The *Gawain* poet normally realizes weak *e* in the final syllable of native compounds and words with a stressed native suffix, eking out a required long dip or providing a syllable with zero stress for the end of the line. Rule 5 would be violated in a few cases by realization of a weak *e* following secondary stress in an anglicized word of French origin. Here as in other cases anglicized French borrowings seem more vulnerable to loss of weak *e* than native words with the same stress contour.³² Weak *e* is also vulnerable to loss in the final syllable of variants with primary stress shifted to a prefix and secondary stress on the root syllable.

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|-----|-----|---|------------------------|
| (6) | (a) | <i>with chalkquyte vayles</i> (958b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘with chalk-white wrappings’ | |
| | (b) | <i>semlych[e] ryche</i> (882b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘becomingly luxurious’ | |
| | (c) | <i>þo ladyes were</i> (950b; cf. 2030b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘those ladies were’ | |
| | (d) | <i>cowardys(e) me taȝt[e]</i> (2379b) | SxxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘cowardice taught me’ | |
| | (e) | <i>remord(e) to myseluen</i> (2434b) | SxxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘to recall with remorse’ | |
| | (f) | <i>quat-so bifall(e)z after</i> (382b) | xxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | | ‘whatever befalls afterward’ | |

The plural *-e* of a native compound adjective completes the required long dip in (6a). Putter and Stokes insert the adverbial *-e* in (6b), which is realized in a native suffix for the same purpose. In such cases the preceding syllable, which has subordinate stress, counts as part of the dip (section 8.5). The suffix *-lych* is used systematically to create long dips, providing strong empirical evidence for rule 1.³³ In (6c), *-e* is realized after a *y* vowel that was originally the root vowel of a secondary compound constituent. The original stress on the *y* vowel has evidently been lost, since *lady* can stand at the end of the line where an unstressed final syllable is required. In (6d), realization of *-e* in a long French borrowing would create an **ultralong dip**, violating rule 5. The same violation would result in (6e) from realization of *-e* in a variant French borrowing with stress shifted to the prefix. In (6f), realization of *-e* in a native variant with a stressed prefix would create a second long dip, violating rule 1. Distribution in the corpus is summarized below for other words with weak *e* after secondary stress.

- A. Weak *e* is realized to obtain the required long dip in the compound words *fiften[e]* 40b, *ston[e]stil[le]* 242b, *Crystmasse* 683b, *stalworth[e]* 846b, *charcole* 875b and *alway[e]s* 1482b; in the suffixed words *rechles[se]* 40b,

glowande 236b, *shinande* 269b, *berdlez[e]* 280b, *blycande* 305b, *bremlych[e]* 509b, *comlych[e]* (539b, 855b, 2411b), *luflych[e]* 575b, *coyntlych[e]* 578b, *folzande* 859b, *saylande* 865b, *talkyng[e]* 917b, *criande* 1088b, *lemande* 1119b, *zarande* 1724b, *menskful[le]* 1809b, and *gostlych[e]* 2461b; and in the French borrowings *Bretaugne* 25b, *Arthurez* 29b, *gentyle* 42b, *mesure* 137b, *hawbergh[e]* 203b, *giserne* 288b, *cortays[e]* 469b, *contrayez* 713b, *seruise* 940b, *daynt[y]es* 998b, *fraunchis[e]* 1264b, *semblaun[ce]* 1273b, *carolez* 1655b, *Rena[r]de* 1916b, *venquys[hed]* 2412b, and *honoured* 2482b.

- B. Weak *e* is unrealized to avoid violation of Inoue's law in the French borrowings *chevysaunc(e)* 1406b and *dalyaunc(e)* 1529b.
- C. Weak *e* is unrealized before a final consonant to avoid a second long dip in *dévis(e)d* 92b, a French borrowing with stress shifted to the alliterating prefix.

Weak e Between Primary and Secondary Stress

Before secondary stress, weak *e* is usually but not always realized in Chaucer's poetry.³⁴ When realized, this vowel occupies a **weak position** and the syllable with secondary stress occupies a **strong position**. When the weak *e* is lost, the syllable with secondary stress occupies a weak position. In SGGK, a weak *e* of this kind can supply a necessary syllable for a long dip and, if realized, never creates an **ultralong dip** or a second long dip.

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|-----|--|------------------|
| (7) | (a) <i>of truehuf crafties</i> (1527b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'of the skills of true love' | |
| | (b) <i>þe endeles knot[te]</i> (630b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'the endless knot' | |
| | (c) <i>metely come</i> (1004b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'appropriately came' | |
| | (d) <i>þe auncian lady</i> (2463b; cf. 216b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'the venerable lady' | |
| | (e) <i>and ferlyly long[e]</i> (796b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'and wondrously long' | |

In (7a), an *e* internal to a compound adds crucially to the long dip, which includes the constituent with subordinate stress. In (7b–c), the *e* required for the long dip stands before a suffix with subordinate stress. An unstressed metrical syllable between primary and secondary stress completes the required long dip in the following additional cases: *kyndely* 135b, *agh[e]lich* 136b, *gracios* 216b, *semlyly* 622b, *craftyly* 797b, *sellyly* 963b and 1803b, *dern[e]ly* 1183b, *hendely* 1228b, *derehy* 1559b, and *luflyly* 2389b.

Elision of Final Weak -e and Suffixal -y

Chaucer usually elides weak *-e* when the following word begins with an unstressed vowel or with *h* followed by an unstressed vowel.³⁵ Elision of this kind seems to be mandatory in SGGK. In item (8) and subsequently, elision is notated by an underscore linking *-e* to the following vowel.

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|-----|---|------------------------|
| (8) | (a) <i>alle_on hwes</i> (867b) | *SxSx |
| | (meaning problematic) | |
| | (b) <i>sesounde_of þe best[e]</i> (889b) | SxxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘seasoned with the best (ingredients)’ | |
| | (c) <i>to take_hit to yourseluen</i> (350b) | xSxxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘to take it upon yourself’ | |
| | (d) <i>by þe hede_and more</i> (333b; cf. 691b) | xxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | ‘(taller) by a head and more’ | |
| | (e) <i>as he couþe_awayse</i> (1389b) | xxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | ‘as he could manage’ | |

There are no persuasive analogues in SGGK for the types of non-elision Ten Brink identifies in Chaucer.³⁶ Item (8a) is the only b-verse in which elision of *e* would eliminate a required long dip. This verse makes little sense as it stands, however, and is probably corrupt.³⁷ In (8b), elision before a vowel avoids an **ultralong dip**. Elision before *h* serves the same purpose in (8c). Elision before *h* is expected given alliterative practice in SGGK, where vowel-initial words **alliterate** routinely with *h*-initial words.³⁸ The *h* was present in **underlying forms** but did not obstruct elision of weak *-e* or alliterative matching. In (8d), elision of dative *-e* avoids a second long dip. In (8e), the auxiliary *couþe* alliterates and its inflectional *-e* is expressed, but elision of this *-e* avoids a second **long dip**. The final *-e* might simply be disregarded when *couþe* has low prominence in a dip, but when *couþe* alliterates its final vowel requires attention.

Chaucer elides weak *-e* before stressed as well as unstressed vowels but alliterative poetry differs in this respect.³⁹ There are no clear cases of elision, and elision would be unacceptable in several cases.

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------|
| (9) | (a) <i>and bihinde eke</i> (1741b; cf. 734b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘and behind as well’ | |
| | (b) <i>best ar[e] holden</i> (259b; cf. 648b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘are considered (to be) best’ | |
| | (c) <i>hit to þe erþe</i> (427b; cf. 1443b, 2314b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘fell to the earth’ | |

In (9a), elision before a vowel would remove the mandatory long dip. In (9b), elision before *h* would create the same problem. Chaucer often elides the definite article *the/þe* before a following stressed vowel.⁴⁰ In (9c)

and two similar b-verses, this type of elision would destroy the long dip. Only inflectional *-e* is eligible for elision in SGGK. The root vowel in *þe* may sometimes have been pronounced as schwa but the poet does not elide it. Middle English *þe* behaves like the modern form with an underlying tense vowel that is realized before a stressed vowel in the following word, as in *the earth*, where *the* is realized as [ði].

The final vowel spelled < y > in suffixed forms like *many/mony* can elide with a following vowel in Chaucer's poetry. Unlike weak *-e*, *-y* does not elide when *h-* intervenes. Chaucer elides *y-* "with extraordinary frequency" in *many_a*.⁴¹ This paradigmatic **elision** also occurs in SGGK.

- | | | |
|------|---|-------------------------|
| (10) | (a) <i>with mony_a blyþe laȝter</i> (1217b) | xxxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | 'with many a happy laugh' | |
| | (b) <i>redyly, _if I myȝt[e]</i> (2059b; cf. 2245b) | SxxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'unhesitatingly, if I were able' | |
| | (c) <i>sellyly ofte</i> (1803b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'wondrously often' | |
| | (d) <i>mony apæl freke</i> (241b; cf. 1654b) | xxSxSx (hypermetrical) |
| | 'many a noble man' | |
| | (e) <i>rapely_a þrowe</i> (2219b; cf. 756b, 1183b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'busily for a time' | |
| | (f) <i>Gladly I wolde</i> (225b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | 'I would gladly (meet that man)' | |

In (10a), elision in *mony_a* avoids violation of rule 5 in the initial dip of a hypermetrical b-verse. Elision of *-ly* seems to be unusual in Chaucer's iambic line.⁴² In (10b), however, elision must reduce the **ultralong dip** to avoid a violation of rule 5. The *-ly* suffix is not elided before a stressed vowel in (10c), since that would destroy the required long dip. As (10d) shows, *mony* also avoids elision before a stressed vowel. Neither weak *-e* nor suffixal *-y* seems to elide before a stressed vowel in SGGK. Such elision is never necessary to avoid an ultralong dip or a second long dip. Elision of *-y* before an unstressed vowel in (10e) would not destroy the long dip. Since weak *e* is normally syllabic between primary and secondary stress, a long dip with two syllables would still be available after elision here. Elision of *-y* might have been ruled out in such cases if *-y* acquired special **prominence** when preceded by weak *e*. Elision would destroy the long dip in (10f), but in this case the idiomatic suffix *-ly* is probably a scribal substitution for *-lich(e)*, which is used systematically to provide long dips. Scribal substitution of *-ly* for *-lich(e)* seems likely in other b-verses as well.⁴³

5.4 Hypermetrical B-Verses and Type A₁ with Anacrusis

In *Beowulf* there are 7 b-verses of type A₁ with an unstressed syllable before the first alliteration (in anacrusis). Item (11a) is typical.⁴⁴

- (11) (a) (*swā*) *sē* be- / *būgeð* (1223b) (x)S:x/Sx
 ‘(as far) as the sea encompasses’
 (b) *Dū scealt tō // frōfre / weorþan* (1707b) (x)xx//Sx/Sx
 ‘You will serve as a consolation’
 (c) *ne ðorfe him ðā // lēan oð- / wītan* (2995b) (xxx)xx//Sx/Sx
 ‘it was not necessary to criticize him for that gift’

There are nine hypermetrical b-verses in the poem like (11b–c), which have an embedded normal verse of type A₁.⁴⁵ Hypermetrical b-verses are distinguished carefully from type A₁ variants with anacrusis. In *Beowulf*, all hypermetrical b-verses are adjacent to hypermetrical a-verses and all have at least two syllables in the dip before the first alliteration. There is no limit on the number of syllables in this initial dip, apart from constraints imposed by ordinary grammar and the universal inhibition of lines with more than nine words (section 1.14). Type A₁ b-verses, on the other hand, never have more than one syllable before the first alliteration. Among the nine hypermetrical b-verses, seven are like (11b), with a trochaic word realizing the first Sx foot (78 percent). The others are like (11c), with the first alliteration on a monosyllable (22 percent). The A₁ variants with anacrusis all have the first alliteration on a monosyllable.

In hypermetrical b-verses, the initial dip provided a traditional site for the long strings of function words that proliferated during the tenth century and afterwards. *Judith*, which dates from the tenth century, has a higher frequency of hypermetrical verses than any other Old English poem (section 4.5). Enhanced frequency of the preferred variant is already underway in *Judith*, where sixty-three of the hypermetrical b-verses are like (11b) and only four are like (11c). Corresponding relative frequencies are 94 percent and 6 percent, as compared with 78 percent and 22 percent for *Beowulf*.

The requirement of clustering for hypermetrical verses was still maintained in *Judith* but had been abandoned by the fourteenth century. No relevant poetry survives from the period when clustering was phased out, but we can obtain some insight into this period from the Old Saxon meter of the *Heliand*, which evolved more rapidly than Old English meter due to a faster pace of change in the Old Saxon language.⁴⁶ In the *Heliand*, 63 percent of the hypermetrical b-verses are unclustered and it has become more difficult to distinguish them from b-verses with anacrusis.⁴⁷

To mitigate this problem, the *Heliand* poet employs a higher frequency of preferred **realizations** in unclustered hypermetrical verses.

- (12) (a) *al sô it thar thô mid is // uuordun / sagde* (1333b) (xxxxx)xx//Sx/Sx
 'just as he said it with his words then (and) there'
 (b) *endi sculun than / lôn ant-/fâhan* (2597b) (xx)xx(x)//S:x/Sx
 'and then they shall receive a reward'

Among the clustered verses in the *Heliand* are sixty preferred variants like (12a). There are thirteen clustered instances like (12b) with an S:x word group in the first trochaic foot. The relative frequencies are 82 percent for the preferred variants and 18 percent for the complex variants, about the same as in *Beowulf*. In unclustered verses, the corresponding relative frequencies are 94 percent and 6 percent (130:9), the same frequencies we observe in *Judith*. We would expect an even higher frequency for preferred variants when clustering had been abandoned altogether, as in SGGK.

In the type A1 b-verses of SGGK, the first alliterating constituent is monosyllabic in approximately 160 instances out of 1,050 (15 percent). Among about 350 hypermetrical b-verses with two or more syllables in the first dip, comparable instances are extremely rare.

- (13) (a) *and zet fla3 I neuer* (2276b) xxSxSx
 'and yet I never fled'
 (b) *as 3e may now here* (447b, > *mowe(n) here*) xxSxSx
 'as you may now hear'
 (c) *and no3t haf[> haue]_I geten* (1943b; cf. 2433b) xxSx_xSx
 'and I have got nothing'

There are perhaps seven instances like (13a), with a monosyllable as the first alliterating word.⁴⁸ Item (13b) looks similar but monosyllabic *may* should probably be replaced by *mowen*.⁴⁹ The archaic variant *mowe(n)* is employed for rhyme in line 1397 and has trochaic value at line end in other alliterative poems.⁵⁰ In the verses like (13c), a verb acquires the added prominence of alliteration and should realize its inflectional *-e*. If we insert the expected *-e*, elision with the following *I* avoids an ultralong dip in both cases. Even if we count (11b–c) as exceptions, the frequency for hypermetrical b-verses with an alliterating monosyllable will be no more than 3 percent, as compared with 6 percent for *Judith* and for unclustered hypermetrical b-verses in the *Heliand*.

Distinguishing hypermetrical b-verses from type A1 **variants** with an initial dip makes an important generalization possible: in the Middle English b-verse, the **long dip** evolved from the Old English dip that was more tolerant of **extrametrical function words**. In type A1, this was the

medial dip. In hypermetrical b-verses, it was the initial dip. Use of the appropriate traditional location for a long dip would be expected in the b-verse, where the universal [principle of closure](#) restricted departure from perceived norms throughout the evolution of the meter.

5.5 Frequency Counts for Type A1 and Hypermetrical Variants

When choosing among possible emendations it is important to know which choice would realize the metrical pattern of highest frequency. Some useful frequencies can be obtained from a corpus of variants that contain, internally to the verse, no forms with final *-e*, no high-frequency variants like *on/vpon*, no forms with unstressed *ede*, *ele*, *ene*, or *ere*, and no elidable sequences. From this corpus of limited ambiguity I have also excluded verses containing words to which final *-e*, though not present in the manuscript, might well be added, including plural or definite adjectives, nouns immediately preceded by a preposition, imperatives, infinitives, and certain finite verbs. Line-final words are unambiguous in the b-verse because their scansion is determined by rule 3. Characteristics of the final word are not used to exclude b-verses from the corpus of limited ambiguity.

[Table 5.3](#) shows the distributions for type A1 and the hypermetrical b-verse. This matrix display provides the number of instances for each pattern of dups. The number of syllables in the first dip, which can be zero, is specified to the left for each horizontal row of figures. The number of syllables in the second dip is specified at the top for each vertical column. Variants with unusual alliterative patterns are excluded for the present. It will be convenient to deal with these after we have analyzed less complex variants.

Table 5.3 *Dip Structures in the Corpus of Limited Ambiguity (647 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4
initial				
↓				
0	2	138	31	1
1	12	338	67	1
2	36	9	2	
3	10			

The type A₁ variant with a short initial dip and a medial dip of two syllables has the highest frequency, with 338 instances. When a third syllable is added to the medial dip, the number of instances drops to 67. The A₁ variant with no initial dip and two syllables in the medial dip has the second-highest frequency, with 138 instances. With a third syllable added to the medial dip, the number of instances drops to 31. The most common hypermetrical pattern, with 36 instances, has two syllables in the initial dip. A third syllable added to the initial dip reduces the number of instances to 10. All these patterns have good Old English precedents and most have similar relative frequencies in *Beowulf*. In *Beowulf* as in SGGK, A₁ variants have a higher frequency than hypermetrical variants, and disyllabic dips are more common than trisyllabic dips. The new Middle English developments are avoidance of variants without a **long dip** and a much higher frequency of short initial dips in type A₁ (evolved from b-verses with monosyllabic **anacrusis**). These developments continue trends already apparent in late Old English poetry (sections 4.5 and 4.6). Manuscript variants lacking a long dip (in italics) have a total of 14 instances. Manuscript variants with a second long dip (in bold italics) total 11 instances. Manuscript variants with an ultralong dip (in bold) total 2 instances.

The corpus of limited ambiguity excludes many variants with a scansion that is almost if not absolutely certain. This shortcoming creates an anomaly on Table 5.3: the frequency for hypermetrical variants with three syllables in the dip. These variants are permitted by rules 1–5 but show a lower frequency than the manuscript variants with two **short dips**, which violate rule 1.

Realization of underlying *e* can vary but the tendencies we have observed can be incorporated into a provisional scansion system.

To be scanned as metrical syllables: Weak final *-e* in words with prominent phrasal stress and weak *e* between primary and secondary stress. When presence and absence of underlying *e* seem about equally probable in a prominent word, I scan according to the manuscript spelling.

To be scanned as a metrical syllable except when a rule violation would result: Weak *e* after secondary stress.

To be scanned as a metrical syllable only to avoid a rule violation or to obtain a strongly preferred scansion: Weak final *-e* in high-frequency words with low prominence, weak *e* before a final consonant when requirements for contraction are met, and a second weak *e* in adjacent unstressed syllables.

Never to be scanned as a metrical syllable: Weak final *-e* and suffixal *-y* when requirements for **elision** are met.

Table 5.4 *Dip Structures in the Larger Corpus (1,628 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4
initial				
↓				
0	2	293	90	1
1	14	723	185	1
2	218	12	2	
3	87			

This procedure is not entirely accurate, of course, but the philological labor required to make it more accurate would take us beyond the scope of this book; and the results, though very important for editing individual lines, would have little impact on relative pattern frequencies.⁵¹ The provisional scansion system will provide useful approximations that can be cross-checked against frequencies from the corpus of limited ambiguity. Verses with unusual alliterative patterns are excluded for later discussion as before.

The anomaly in Table 5.3 disappears in Table 5.4. Hypermetrical verses with three syllables in the initial dip, which conform to rules 1–5, now outnumber variants with two *short dips*. The preferred hypermetrical variant, with two syllables in the long dip, now has higher frequency than type A1 with three syllables in the long dip. Hypermetrical b-verses are under-represented in Table 5.3 because they normally *alliterate* on trochaic words, which often have the final *-e* that excludes a verse from the smaller corpus.

Three generalizations have now emerged. In the b-verse, disyllabic dips are preferred to trisyllabic dips, type A1 is preferred to the hypermetrical type, and verses with two dips are preferred to verses with one dip. These three independent preferences clash or reinforce one another to produce the relative frequencies we observe. When the first two preferences clash, the preference for disyllabic dips takes priority, as shown by the high frequency for the hypermetrical pattern with a *short dip* and a disyllabic dip. The type A1 variant with short dip and a trisyllabic dip has a preferable type but a lower frequency. When type preference clashes with the preference for two dips, type preference takes priority. Type A1 variants with a single dip have higher frequencies than hypermetrical variants with two dips and the same number of syllables in the long dip. The preference for disyllabic *long dips* is strongest, then, followed by type preference. These preferences are inherited from Old English metrical tradition.

The preference for two dips was established later and is probably weaker for that reason. The Middle English system of preferences is comprehensible only under our hypothesis of continuous development. That hypothesis alone can explain the persistence of Old English verse types as norms for metrical practice in SGGK.

Within a given type, variants can be distinguished by specifying the number of syllables in each dip. The rank order of preference for type A1, as represented in Table 5.4, is 1/2, 0/2, 1/3, 0/3. The rank order for hypermetrical b-verses is 2/1, 3/1. Of the thirty-two remaining exceptions, Putter and Stokes eliminate twenty-three by various editorial improvements.⁵²

5.6 Emendation in Metrical and Editorial Theory

An editor will want to identify the best possible emendation for an anomalous verse. When two or more emendations seem plausible, an editor may print the anomaly and leave the emending to scholarly users of the text. For a metrist, the point of the exercise is to identify manuscript verses with no evidentiary value and exclude them from theoretical consideration. Speculative emendation provides a useful technique of assessment in this quite different undertaking. A variety of possible remedies will strengthen the case for exclusion. Anomalies that might so obviously have been otherwise provide no incentive to complicate a theory. Putter and Stokes eliminate most of the exceptions on Table 5.4 with “obvious and minor emendations.”⁵³ They leave unchanged a smaller number of exceptions with features less widely regarded as unacceptable. Putter and Stokes seldom emend an a-verse on metrical grounds, for example, not even when it violates their own new rules.⁵⁴

As examples of hypothetical emendation I add remedies for the remaining exceptions on Table 5.4. References to metrically correct verses are provided to show that the emendation conforms to traditional style. Emendations of my own are headed by the character < # > to distinguish them from emendations by Putter and Stokes and from verses constructed to illustrate metrical deficiencies (marked with an asterisk).

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (14) | (a) #as <i>god</i> [e] <i>m</i> [e] <i>n</i> <i>schulde</i> (2349b).
‘as good men should’ | xSxxSx |
| | (b) #of <i>þe</i> <i>fowlest</i> (of) <i>alle</i> (1329b; cf. 1408b)
‘from all the most inferior ones’ | xxSxSx |
| | (c) #on <i>þat</i> <i>oþer</i> <i>syde</i> (<i>sittes</i>) (110b; cf. 2016a)
‘on the other side’ | xxSxSx |
| | (d) #to <i>fonge</i> <i>þe</i> <i>knyȝt</i> [<i>þanne</i>] (816b; cf. 1649b, 2154b)
‘to receive the knight then’ | xSxxxSx |

All emendations yield common verse patterns, notated in the scansions to the right. In (14a), a verse without a long dip is emended by a simple change in number that has no effect on denotation (what a good man should do, good men should do). Item (14b) restores an archaic noun-adjective construction, eliminating the second long dip. A satisfactory verb for (14c) is available in the previous line and *sittes*, though more idiomatic, is inessential. With *sittes* removed, *side* occupies a lift, a more appropriate position for a trochaic noun, and the second long dip is eliminated.⁵⁵ In (14d), addition of semantically inessential *panne* provides trochaic closure. Since *knight* often functions like a pronoun in SGGK, it can occupy the dip. Formulaic strategies employed in (14a–d) yield normal scansion in several other instances.⁵⁶

5.7 Double Alliteration in the Middle English B-Verse

In an Old English b-verse, the first syllable with metrically significant stress must alliterate and no other syllable may alliterate. In SGGK, however, there are 62 b-verses of type A1 with a second alliteration on the verse-final word. Item (15a) is a representative example.⁵⁷

- | | | |
|------|--|---------|
| (15) | (a) <i>so long wyth a lady</i> (1299b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘so long with a lady’ | |
| | (b) <i>and I schal stonde styлле</i> (2252b) | xxxSxSx |
| | ‘and I shall stand still’ | |
| | (c) <i>red golde rynges</i> (857b) | SxxSx |
| | ‘red gold rings’ | |
| | (d) <i>with bryzt golde bounden</i> (600b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘adorned with bright gold’ | |
| | (e) <i>and fele kyn fischez</i> (890b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘and many kinds of fish’ | |
| | (f) <i>a myst-bakel huge</i> (2081b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘a huge cloak of mist’ | |

The final Sx word also alliterates in seventeen hypermetrical variants like (15b).⁵⁸ Middle English poets had begun to employ b-verses with alliteration on both lifts.⁵⁹ The second alliterating lift actually facilitates scansion in verses like (15c), where the boundaries of a heavy medial dip are clearly marked on both sides by alliterating words. Compare (15d), with *golde* in the medial dip; (15e), with *kyn* in the medial dip; and (15f), where the secondary constituent of *myst-bakel* alliterates and the primary constituent *myst-* occupies the long dip of a hypermetrical b-verse. On occasional placement of nouns and adjectives in the dip, see section 8.5. The added alliteration provides an especially valuable guide to scansion in (15f)

because compounds usually alliterate on the first constituent. Triple alliteration serves a similar purpose in Middle English a-verses with three locations for dips, where a final dip of unusual length is typically bounded with a third alliterating syllable (sections 9.6 and 9.12). Use of optional alliteration to demarcate an unusual dip was well established in Old English type A1 (section 3.4). This technique found new uses as the metrical system evolved.

Given changes in the language since the era of *Beowulf*, non-traditional verses like (15a–f) would be expected to develop. Alliteration is universally linked to prominent stress and Middle English had a much higher frequency of SVO constructions with the most prominent stress on the final word. Alliteration on the final lift of the b-verse had already begun to occur in late Old English poetry (section 4.12).

Double alliteration in the b-verse removes an important contrast with the a-verse. This adds complexity, as the restricted number of instances shows. The boundaries of the dips are well marked, however, and there are no serious problems of scansion. B-verses with double alliteration are otherwise like ordinary b-verses and have a surprisingly similar distribution of dip structures, with the same rank ordering. Once again we have the 1/2 structure in first place (33 instances), followed by 0/2 (17 instances), 2/1 (11 instances), 1/3 (6 instances), 0/3 (4 instances) and 3/1 (3 instances). There are single instances for the anomalous dip structures 1/1, 2/2, and 1/4.

5.8 Words that can Occupy either a Lift or a Dip

The number of lifts in a b-verse must be exactly two, with an alliterating syllable on the first lift and the stress of the verse-final trochee on the second lift. Any third stressed syllable in a b-verse will occupy a dip and must have the kind of intermediate phrasal stress acceptable there. In Old English poetry, words with intermediate phrasal stress sometimes occupy the dip before the first alliteration but may also provide the only alliteration in the verse.⁶⁰

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------------|
| (16) | (a) <i>þe we nū drēogað</i> (<i>Guthlac</i> A 49b)
'which we now suffer' | (xx)x/S:sx (type C) |
| | (b) <i>Eart nū tīdfara</i> (<i>Guthlac</i> A 9b)
'you are now a happy traveller' | (x)x/Ssx (type C) |
| | (c) <i>as it now hat[te]</i> (G 10b)
'as it is now called' | xxSSx (type C) |
| | (d) <i>Now ridez þis renk</i> (G 691a)
'Now this man rides' | xSxxS (type B) |

Old English *nū* ‘now’ alliterates on the first lift in (16a) and occupies the initial dip in (16b). Its Middle English descendant *now* alliterates in (16c) and occupies the initial dip in (16d). Middle English words that behave like *now* include quantifiers like *mony*, vague intensifiers like *ful*, space/time verbs like *com*, verbs of mental life like *knowe*, verbs of speaking like *sayd*, and control verbs like *hade* (used as a main verb). Most such words have Old English ancestors with the same variant metrical values (section 4.11).

5.9 Placement of Finite *Be*, Finite Auxiliaries, and Words Semantically Bleached

In late Old English poetry, auxiliaries and the verb *to be* moved with increased frequency from archaic final position to positions that were less ideal from a metrical point of view. Even in the era of *Maldon*, however, such verbs were excluded from level-6 dips in *anacrusis* (section 4.5). By the era of SGGK, the increasing predominance of SVO syntax had accelerated late Old English trends. Table 5.5 shows the distribution of finite auxiliaries and finite forms of auxiliary verbs in b-verses of type A1. Level 3 is not applicable here because type A1 does not contain a light foot.

None of the Old English poems surveyed have any kind of verb at level 6, in *anacrusis*. In SGGK, finite *be* appears almost as often at level 6 as on the line-final lift at level 2, a common location in Old English type A1. Old English levels 4 and 5 are combined for the Middle English counts because the difference between these levels has significance only within a word-foot meter. In *Beowulf*, finite *be* appears 38 times at level 4 or 5, as compared with 106 times at level 2 (Table 4.12). In SGGK, instances at levels 4–5 predominate. In *Beowulf*, finite *be* occurs just once at level 1, in an a-verse.

Table 5.5 *Word Placement in the Dips of Type A1 B-Verses*

Levels	1	2	3	4–5	6	total
<i>be</i> (finite)	5	16	n/a	48	17	86
auxiliary (finite)	8	20	n/a	23	12	63
<i>quoth</i> (all instances)					3	3
<i>think</i> and main verb <i>have</i> (finite, in dip only)				3		3
<i>Sir</i> (all instances)					3	3
other noun or adjective (in dip)				51	1	52

In the Middle English b-verse, where metrical complexity is inhibited, SGGK provides five examples of finite *be* at level 1. Trends are similar for finite auxiliaries, which have low frequency at levels 1, 4, and 5 in Old English poetry (Table 4.13). The decline in frequency at level 2 is already evident in *Maldon*, where only 40 percent of finite auxiliaries occupy verse-final position, as compared with 70 percent in *Beowulf*. *Maldon* also points toward the future in its placement of finite quasi-auxiliaries and verbs of similar prominence (Table 4.14). Such verbs appear five times at level 4 in *Maldon* and once at level 5, as compared with a single instance at level 4 in the much longer *Beowulf*.

Middle English *quoþ* requires special attention. Used routinely for formulaic expression of direct discourse, *quoþ* is an extreme example of semantic bleaching that never occupies a lift in the b-verse. In type A1 b-verses, the *Gawain* poet always places this verb at level 6, on the least prominent position. The noun *Sir*, another extreme example of bleaching, appears only at level 6 in Middle English type A1. Although levels 4, 5, and 6 had begun to accept more prominent constituents in *Maldon*, placement of lexical nouns or adjectives at those levels is rare even in late Old English poetry. At level 3, the only such constituents allowed were subordinated in predicate nominative or predicate adjective constructions (section 4.2). Nouns and adjectives occupy a dip with somewhat higher frequency in SGGK, most often at levels 4–5. As we shall see in Chapter 8, extinction of types E and A2a, which still survived in *Maldon*, cleared the way for these Middle English variants.

Table 5.6 provides counts for hypermetrical b-verses. The dip at levels 4–5 is largely irrelevant in this type because it is seldom occupied by an independent unstressed word (section 5.4). Level 6 is not applicable in hypermetrical b-verses. Any unstressed word before the first alliteration occupies a level-3 dip.

Table 5.6 *Word Placement in the Dips of Hypermetrical B-Verses*

Levels	1	2	3	4–5	6	total
<i>to be</i> (finite)	0	7	9	0	n/a	16
auxiliary (finite)	3	16	17	0	n/a	36
<i>quoþ</i> (all instances)			4	0	n/a	4
<i>hold</i> and <i>say</i> (finite, in dip only)			2	0	n/a	2
noun or adjective (in dip)			9	0	n/a	9

In *Beowulf*, finite *be* has highest frequency in a level-3 dip but auxiliaries favor a level-2 lift. In SGGK, both types of light verb have highest frequency in the level-3 dip, a verse-initial dip that allows for VO order. The poet also obtains VO order by placing an auxiliary on a level-1 lift, which occurs in three instances. The poet always places *quoth* in an initial dip at level 3, the least prominent dip routinely used for monosyllables in hypermetrical b-verses.

5.10 Alliteration in the Dip

In *Beowulf*, words with intermediate stress alliterate only when they occupy a lift. In SGGK, words with intermediate stress sometimes alliterate in the well-defined dip of the b-verse, as with underscored *now* in (17a).

- (17) (a) *bot neked now wontez* (1062b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 ‘only a little is now lacking’
 (b) *and hay! hay! cryed* (1445b) xxSSx (type C)
 ‘and cried, “hey, hey!”’

The first instance of exclamatory *hay!* was probably subordinated in (17b), which would then scan normally as type C. Compare Modern English *wèll*, *wéll!* Alliteration on the second lift of the b-verse usually involves nouns, verbs, or adjectives with prominent phrasal stress.⁶¹ Such words frequently occupy x positions and can be identified as metrically unstressed even when they alliterate.⁶² Secondary constituents of compounds, with a stress easily recognizable as subordinate, can also alliterate in the dip.⁶³ A few nouns and adjectives alliterate in the dip: *burn* ‘man’ (1631b), *brod* ‘broad’ (1611b), *God* (1837b), and *hyȝ* ‘high, tall’ (1138b). Although *brod* and *hyȝ* are lexical adjectives, they are heavily used as vague intensifiers with low phrasal stress. The dip is an appropriate location for *lexically presupposed burn*, which is employed much like a pronoun in the poem, as with Middle English *mon*.⁶⁴ The lexical noun *God* has high frequency in casual oaths and undergoes semantic bleaching in SGGK.

5.11 Archaic Word Order in SGGK

By the time of SGGK, English had undergone about two thousand years of evolution from the SOV syntax of proto-Germanic toward the SVO syntax of Modern English. SVO word orders that are rare in *Beowulf* often predominate in SGGK. Archaic SOV orders still survive, however. They provide important metrical evidence because they are employed systematically to improve the meter, in alliterative poetry as in iambic

pentameter.⁶⁵ Retention of archaic syntax for its metrical value shows up with particular clarity in traditional *formulas*.

Order of Stressed Object and Finite Verb

The SOV norm of proto-Germanic exerts strong influence during the Old English period. A b-verse with a finite main verb and a noun object almost always has OV order in *Beowulf*, with the more prominent object alliterating and the less prominent verb in a non-alliterating position at the end of the line. There are no exceptions in type A1. The finite verb occasionally precedes a direct object pronoun in *Beowulf*. Item (18a) is the only clear case in a b-verse of type A1.

- (18) (a) *Hēold hine / fæste* (788b) Sxx/Sx verb/object (1X)
 ‘held him fast’
 (b) *hȳran scolde* (10b) Sx/Sx infinitive/auxiliary (74X)
 ‘had to obey’

Old English infinitives are more prominent than the corresponding finite verbs. When an auxiliary stands in archaic position at the end of the line, as in (18b), the infinitive has the more prominent stress and alliterates in preference to the auxiliary.

By the fourteenth century, VO word orders were no longer exceptional in alliterative poetry.

- (19) (a) *maden much joye* (910b) SxxSx verb/object noun (38X)
 ‘made much joy’
 (b) *he stroked his berde* (334b) xSxxSx (12X)
 ‘he stroked his beard’
 (c) *iapez þer maden* (542b) SxxSx object noun/verb (13X)
 ‘made jests there’

It is easy to find variants like (19a), with the finite verb alliterating and a direct object noun as the line-final trochee.⁶⁶ A subject pronoun is expressed in variants like (19b).⁶⁷ VO constructions have obvious metrical utility in the b-verse, making the first lift available for alliterating verbs and the final lift available for trochaic objects. Corresponding OV constructions have not been abandoned, however. Variants like (19c) still have significant frequency in the poem.⁶⁸ Archaic syntax keeps the first lift available for alliterating noun objects and the second lift available for trochaic verbs. In the type A1 a-verse, where both lifts alliterate, there is no need for variants like (19c) and none occur in SGGK. The function of archaic syntax is to improve the meter.

OSV as a Rhetorical Alternative

The direct object *Bretayn* moves to sentence-initial position before a finite verb in item (20).⁶⁹

- (20) *Bretayn he settez* (14b) SxxSx object/subject/verb (17X)
 ‘he establishes Britain’

Here the word order is necessary for the required long dip: **he settez Bretayn* would be unacceptable even with alliteration on *s*. OSV order is seldom if ever basic in the world’s languages.⁷⁰ It typically serves as a rhetorical alternative providing focus on the object. Rhetorical OSV is still used today and is distinctly preferable to archaic SOV. We are more likely to hear *Pancakes I like!* than *I pancakes like!*

Order of Verb and Object in Clauses with Non-Finite Verbs

Archaic OV constructions with infinitive verbs survive as metrically useful alternatives in SGGK.

- (21) (a) *3elpyng to here* (492b) SxxSx noun/infinitive (28X)
 ‘to hear heroic boasting’
 (b) *to telle þe wonder* (480b) xSxxSx infinitive/noun (9X)
 ‘to show forth the wonder’
 (c) *bite non wolde* (1457b) SxxSx infinitive/auxiliary (5X)
 ‘not one would bite into’
 (d) *fynde þe behoues* (324b) SxxxSx infinitive/quasi-aux (7X)
 ‘(it) behooves you to find’

Variants like (21a) have an alliterating noun object in an archaic OV construction.⁷¹ The corresponding VO construction appears in (21b).⁷² An auxiliary provides trochaic closure in variants with archaic syntax like (21c).⁷³ In several instances like (21d), a quasi-auxiliary ancestor of *behoove* provides trochaic closure.⁷⁴ Verbs with light but significant stress provide ideal occupants for the non-alliterating lift at the end of the line.

Order of Verb and Object in Clauses with Object Pronouns

Expression of a pronoun object in a VO construction affects the patterning of dips. The isolated b-verse example in *Beowulf*, *hēold hine fæste*, has fifty-four VO analogues in SGGK.⁷⁵

- (22) (a) *meued him eke* (90b) SxxSx
 ‘moved him also’

- (b) *þæt hasted hym swyþe* (1897b) xSxxSx
 'that mightily hastened'
 (c) *and hete yow fyrre* (2121b) xSxxSx
 'and (I) promise you further'

A direct object pronoun follows the alliterating verb in (22a), creating the optimal long dip for a b-verse: a disyllabic medial dip in type A1. In (22b–c), reflexive and indirect object pronouns perform the same metrical function. All pronoun objects seem to behave identically in Middle English type A1. They are not always easy to distinguish because Old English accusative forms like *hine* have fallen together with dative forms like *him*.

OV constructions with pronoun objects are well attested in some Old English verse types. In type A1, however, an unstressed pronoun can appear only where an unstressed prefix would be preferred: in anacrusis, as a substitute for an inflectional syllable, or as an extrametrical syllable before the second foot. Variants like (23a) are rare even in the opening half of the line.

- (23) (a) *Sōna / (þæt ge-)sāwon* (Beo 1591a) Sx/(xx)Sx
 'soon they saw that'
 (b) *radly hem folzes* (G 1164b) SxxSx
 'swiftly follows them'
 (c) *hym ruced in his sadel* (G 303b; cf. 788b, 1051b) xSxxxSx
 'turned himself in his saddle'
 (d) *renkkez hym brozten* (G 862b) SxxSx
 'men brought to him'
 (e) *syþen I yow knowe* (G 2094b) SxxxSx
 'since I know you'
 (f) *ne noȝt wyl I take* (G 1823b) xSxxSx
 'nor will I take anything'

Old English constraints on **function words** like *þæt* were meaningful only within the word-foot system. When word-foot constraints were relaxed, OV examples could spread into a wider variety of verse types. SGGK contains forty-four type A1 b-verses with an object pronoun followed by a finite verb. In (23b), *hem* creates the required long dip and could not, as a monosyllable, stand at line end.⁷⁶ In the verses like (23c), OV order yields a common type A1 pattern. VO order in (23c) would create an ultralong dip, violating rule 5. A noun subject supplies the alliteration in OV variants like (23d).⁷⁷ In the OV variants like (23e), an expressed pronoun subject contributes to the long dip, often crucially. Systematic use of this archaic construction suggests emendations for two unmetrical b-verses ending in

a monosyllabic pronoun.⁷⁸ Like OSV order, OVS order probably had specialized rhetorical force in SGGK, placing emphasis on the fronted object. In (23f), the fronted object *noȝt* emphasizes Gawain's unwillingness to accept any gift whatsoever.

Order of Verb and Adpositional Modifier

In *Beowulf*, a prepositional phrase often stands in archaic position before the verb.

- | | | |
|------|--|------------------|
| (24) | (a) <i>on / flēam gewand</i> (Beo 1001b) | x/Sxs (type B) |
| | ‘turned in flight’ | |
| | (b) <i>on / stefn stigon</i> (Beo 212a) | x/Ssx (type C) |
| | ‘boarded at the prow’ | |
| | (c) <i>with greme þen(ne) sayde</i> (G 2299b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘in wrath then said’ | |
| | (d) <i>with hym þen irked</i> (G 1573b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘towards him then (they) tired (of advancing)’ | |
| | (e) <i>wyð þeny(e)s to bye</i> (G 79b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘to buy with pennies’ | |

It is easy to find Old English type B verses like (24a) or type C verses like (24b). In type A1, however, a similar phrase located at the beginning of the verse would have its preposition in anacrusis, which adds significant complexity and favors unstressed prefixes over prepositions. Relaxation of constraints on anacrusis allowed fronting of prepositional phrases more often in type A1. The frequency of prepositional *anacrusis* had already increased significantly in *Judith* (section 4.5). In SGGK, twenty-two type A1 b-verses have a prepositional phrase before a finite verb in final position, and eighteen of the twenty-two alliterate on lexical noun objects of the preposition, as with (24c).⁷⁹ In six verses like (24d), the preposition alliterates before an *enclitic* pronoun object of lower prominence.⁸⁰ There are eight verses like (24e), which has an alliterating noun object and an infinitive verb.⁸¹ Such archaic constructions allowed the poet to create a b-verse from a non-alliterating trochaic verb by adding a prepositional phrase. In (24e) the added phrase is semantically inessential and its primary function is metrical, though such concrete detail also adds vividness to the narrative.

A consistent OV language employs postpositions rather than prepositions in adpositional phrases, since adpositions govern objects and assign case to them as verbs do (section 2.8). In *Beowulf* we encounter type B verses like (25a), where the object of the postposition is a pronoun, and type E verses like (25b), where the object is a noun.

- (25) (a) *ic him / æfter sceal* (Beo 2816b) xx/Sxs (type B)
 'I must (go) after them'
 (b) *Scedelandum / in* (Beo 19b) Ssx/S (type E)
 'in South Sweden'
 (c) *a selure_hir ouer* (G 76b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 'a canopy over her'
 (d) *Gwenore bisyde* (G 109b) SxxxSx (type A1)
 'beside Guinevere'

In (25a) the postposition bears stronger stress than the auxiliary verb and its root syllable alliterates on an S position. Type E verses like (25b) have a compound noun object and a stressed **postposition** (section 3.9). Constraints of the word-foot system made it difficult to use postpositions in type A1. There are no examples in *Beowulf*. As we have seen, however, relaxation of Old English constraints allowed useful archaic syntax to spread into a wider variety of verse types. This trend illustrates the paradox of a new metrical development that spreads archaisms. SGGK contains nineteen b-verses like (25c), with the pronoun object of a postposition in the dip, and ten b-verses like (25d), with an alliterating object.⁸² A trochaic postposition with light stress provides an ideal occupant for the non-alliterating Sx sequence at line end. Its object can provide a prominent noun for alliteration, as in (25d), or an unstressed pronoun for the long dip, as in (25c), where a long dip is still present after mandatory elision.

Order of Verb and Subject

Early Germanic languages employed VS order in questions and commands and also for rhetorical purposes. Type A1 examples from *Beowulf* include (26a), a b-verse with a pronoun subject, and (26b), an a-verse with an alliterating noun subject.

- (26) (a) *wisse / (hē) gearwe* (Beo 2339b) Sx/(x)Sx
 'he readily perceived'
 (b) *līxte / (se) lēoma* (Beo 311a) Sx/(x)Sx
 'the light shone'
 (c) *stod he no lenger* (G 2063b) SxxSx
 'he stood no longer'
 (d) *neʒed þe tyme* (G 929b) SxxSx
 'the time (had) approached'
 (e) *dut he no woþe* (G 222b) SxxSx
 'he feared no danger'

- (f) *quop Wawan to þe kyng[e]* (G 343b) xSxxxSx
 ‘said Gawain to the king’
 (g) *So saue me Dryȝtyn!* (G 1548b) xSxxSx
 ‘So save me God!’

Such constructions appear with significant frequency in sggk. The twenty-five b-verse examples include eight like (26c), with a pronoun subject, and twenty-two like (26d), with a noun or derived nominal subject.⁸³ Modern SV word order would leave these examples without a long dip. Objects are expressed overtly in six additional instances with pronoun subjects. A representative example is (26e), where inversion is required for the long dip.⁸⁴ VS constructions that survive today in prose, as for example in questions, should be distinguished from poetic archaisms that survived for metrical reasons. Item (26f) still translates normally in written discourse as ‘said Gawain to the king.’ VS order also survives in some subjunctive or imperative constructions, mostly of a formulaic character. Item (26g) has a close analogue in *So help me God*, a legal formula that puts a witness on oath.

Order of Noun and Adjective

The *Beowulf* poet employs archaic noun-adjective (NA) constructions or modern adjective-noun (AN) constructions according to metrical requirements (section 2.8).

- (27) (a) *mǣrne / þēoden* (Beo 201a) Sx/Sx
 ‘famous king’
 (b) *þēoden / mǣrne* (Beo 353a) Sx/Sx
 (c) *in naked[e] rokkez* (G 730b) xSxxSx
 ‘in bare rocks’
 (d) *in erdez vncoupe* (G 1808b) xSxxSx
 ‘in unknown regions’
 (e) *with bount(e)s hor aw[ne]* (G 1519b) xSxxSx
 ‘by their own (worthy) deeds’
 (f) *wele ful hoge* (G 1820b) SxxSx
 ‘very great wealth’
 (g) *Gawayn þe noble* (G 2149b) SxxSx
 ‘noble Gawain’

A type A1 epithet like (27a), which alliterates on [m], can be inverted when alliteration on [þ] is required, as in (27b). The *Gawain* poet continues to exploit both orders. In the b-verse, the required ordering of two trochaic words places an alliterating word first. AN syntax provides the correct ordering in (27c). NA syntax provides the correct ordering in (27d). Similar

to (27d) is (27e), with a possessive adjective in archaic position. There are forty-seven other type A1 b-verses with AN syntax and forty-two others with NA syntax.⁸⁵ When the adjective stands at the end of a b-verse, the mandatory long dip is often completed by a semantically inessential adverb, as in (27f). A definite article performs the same function in (27g).

Order of Predicate Adjective and Linking Verb

The *Beowulf* poet can place a predicate adjective on either side of *wesan* ‘to be’ or *bēon* ‘to be in general.’ Items (28a–b) are representative.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|-------------------|
| (28) | (a) | <i>was tō / fæst on þām</i> (Beo 137b) | (x)x/Sxs (type B) |
| | | ‘(he) was too fixed on that’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Nō þæt / ȳðe byð</i> (Beo 1002b) | (x)x/Sxs (type B) |
| | | ‘That is not at all easy’ | |
| | (c) | <i>when greuez ar bare</i> (G 207b) | xSxxSx |
| | | ‘when groves are bare’ | |
| | (d) | <i>þæt worst is of alle</i> (G 1792b) | xSxxSx (27X) |
| | | ‘that is worst of all’ | |
| | (e) | <i>*þæt is worst of alle</i> | xxS:xSx |

Items (28c–d) are Middle English analogues of (28a–b), with VO order in (28c) and OV order in (28d). In twenty-seven variants like item (28d), archaic order yields highly favored type A1 patterns.⁸⁶ Normal order in such b-verses would often yield unusual patterns. Item (28e), for example, is a **dispreferred** hypermetrical variant with an alliterating monosyllable.

Another important linking verb is Old English *þyncan* ‘seem,’ ancestor of Middle English *þynkez*, which appears in the ‘methinks’ construction. Like Old English *bēon*, *wesan* and their Middle English descendants, this linking verb can appear before or after the adjective.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|------------------|
| (29) | (a) | <i>þūhte him / eall tō rūm</i> (Beo 2461b) | xxx/Sxs (type B) |
| | | ‘it seemed to him all too spacious’ | |
| | (b) | <i>fægere / þūhton</i> (Beo 866b) | Sx/Sx (type A1) |
| | | ‘seemed pleasant’ | |
| | (c) | <i>þaȝ me þynk ylle</i> (Pa 8b) | xxSSx (type C) |
| | | ‘though (it) may seem bad to me’ | |
| | (d) | <i>þæt sore me þynkeȝ</i> (G 1793b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘that seems painful to me’ | |
| | (e) | <i>lef hit me þynkes</i> (G 1111b) | SxxSx (type A1) |
| | | ‘it seems delightful to me’ | |

The adjective stands in its modern position after the linking verb in (29a) and (29c). In these variants, use of modern word order creates **mismatches**

between linguistic and metrical **prominence**. The stressed verb occupies a level-3 dip in (29a); in (29c), it alliterates in preference to a lexical adjective. In (29b) and (29d), the more archaic construction situates the linking verb on the non-alliterating lift at the end of the line, the optimal placement for a word with light but significant stress.⁸⁷ In (29e), overt expression of the pronoun subject *hit* yields the required long dip. The more modern linking verb *seem* has comparable freedom of placement in SGGK.⁸⁸

Order of Verb and Adverb

Adverbs normally precede finite verbs in Old English type A1. Item (30a) is typical.

- | | | |
|------|--|----------|
| (30) | (a) <i>georne / hȳrdon</i> (Beo 66a) | Sx/Sx |
| | ‘obeyed readily’ | |
| | (b) <i>wiste / (þē) geornor</i> (Beo 821b) | Sx/(x)Sx |
| | ‘(he) perceived the more readily’ | |
| | (c) <i>and bigly forth strydez</i> (G 1584b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘and strides forth mightily’ | |
| | (d) <i>þat gostlych[e] speked</i> (G 2461b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘that spoke like a phantom’ | |

The more modern order, though rare in *Beowulf*, does sometimes occur, as in (30b). Adverbs can still precede the verb today. *He boldly went* sounds more literary than *he went boldly*, but not ungrammatical. The *Gawain* poet exploits the more archaic order in type A1 to meet metrical requirements of the b-verse. Stressed adverbs precede a finite verb in forty-three instances (excluding instances with verbal particles like *up* in constructions like *stood up*). A typical example is (30c). Here a semantically inessential adverb provides alliteration and its *-ly* suffix adds crucially to the long dip, transforming an unmetrical phrase into a b-verse with the most highly valued metrical pattern. The poet’s formulaic technique exploits such adverbs quite systematically. Forms ending in *-ly* or *-lych(e)* provide alliteration in thirty-eight of the forty-three instances and most often add crucially to the long dip. In some of these instances, Putter and Stokes replace a shorter form of the suffix with *-lyche*, which can provide the long dip on its own, as in (30d).⁸⁹ The poet’s systematic use of suffixed adverbs justifies such editorial improvements.

When placed after the finite verb in a type A1 b-verse, adverbs provide trochaic closure in seventy-nine of eighty-one instances. Item (31a) is typical.

- (31) (a) *bot sayde ful hyze* (468b) xSxxSx
 ‘but said very loudly’
 (b) *he kn[e]w(e) wel þe steuen* (2008b) xSxxSx
 ‘he knew well the appointed day’
 (c) *and la[u]ce ne(ue)r tale* (2124b) xSxxSx
 ‘and never tell the tale’

The phrase *ful hyze*, with semantically inessential *ful* modifying another adverb, illustrates an important formulaic technique. The same phrase occurs in verses 307b and 524b. There are similar instances with *ful ofte* (981b and 1561b) and with *ful* modifying various other adverbs (446b, 792b, 799b, and 1702b). Use of semantically inessential adverbs was a highly developed aspect of the poet’s versecraft. Since adverbs appear so frequently at the end of the b-verse, exclusion of adverbs with the *-ly* suffix from that position stands out as systematic. Such forms were perceived as Ss rather than as Sx and could not serve as line-final trochees.⁹⁰ Most adverbs that occupy the dip, as in (31b–c), have high frequency and correspondingly low prominence. They include ancestors of *all*, *ever*, *here*, *never*, *now*, *then*, *there*, and *well*. In (31a), *ful* occupies the dip as a vague intensifier with appropriately low prominence.

Archaic Word Order in Hypermetrical B-Verses

In the vast majority of hypermetrical b-verses, both stressed words are trochaic and whichever one alliterates can stand first. The *Gawain* poet employs archaic syntax for correct placement of the alliterating word.

- (32) (a) *and þe halle entres* (221b) xxSxSx
 ‘and enters the hall’
 (b) *þat þou boden habbes* (327b) xxSxSx
 ‘that you have offered’
 (c) *and to strike lou(i)es* (2099b) xxSxSx
 ‘and loves to strike’
 (d) *and þat I leue noupe* (1784b) xxxSxSx
 ‘and I believe that now’
 (e) *and noȝt haf[e]_I geten* (1943b) xxSxSx
 ‘and I have got nothing’
 (f) *bop(e) bityde sorȝe* (2383b) xxSxSx
 ‘may sorrow befall both’
 (g) *þenne greued mony* (1442b) xxSxSx
 ‘then many grieved’
 (h) *#require[_I] yow here* (1056b, < *I require*) *xxSxxSx > xSxxSx
 ‘I ask you here’

An alliterating object precedes the finite verb in fifteen instances like (32a).⁹¹ A variety of auxiliary verbs follow the main verb in seventeen instances like (32b).⁹² Item (32c) has a similar archaic construction with the *to* infinitive followed by a finite main verb. In (32d), rhetorical OSV order moves *þat* to the long initial dip, shortening the second dip as required. Rhetorical OVS order removes a monosyllable from line-final position in (32e) and places the least prominent word in the initial dip of (32f). Rhetorical VS order positions an alliterating verb correctly in (32g). Item (32h) looks like an instance of syntactic trivialization. As it stands in the manuscript, this b-verse has two long dips. With restoration of VS order, (32h) scans as the most common type A1 variant.

In sixteen hypermetrical b-verses, a prepositional phrase stands in archaic position before the finite verb, as in item (33).

- (33) *upon fote lyztis* (329b) xxSxSx
'alights on foot'

Here the prominent object noun is the most appropriate candidate for alliteration and the less prominent verb is well suited to the non-alliterating final position.⁹³

Archaic noun-adjective word order occurs in six hypermetrical b-verses like (34a).⁹⁴

- (34) (a) *at þe chapel grene* (2103b) xxSxSx
'at the green chapel'
(b) *and of golde hewen* (211b) xxSxSx
'and of beaten gold'
(c) *with þe noble pipes* (118b; cf. 95b, 111b, 189b) xxSxSx
'with the noble pipes'

A similar construction appears in (34b), where the past participle *hewen* functions as an attributive adjective. Modern adjective-noun order is slightly less common, with a few instances like (34c).

Archaic Word Order in B-Verses with Double Alliteration

Some archaic constructions occur in type A1 b-verses with alliteration on both lifts.

- (35) (a) *þat au[nter] byholdez* (250b; cf. 842b, 1406b) xSxxSx
'beholds that marvel'
(b) *hit(te) me bihou[es]* (2296b) SxxSx
'it behooves me to strike'
(c) *wythinne hem hit were* (1435b) SxxxSx
'that it was within them'

- | | |
|---|--------|
| (d) <i>and set hym bysyde</i> (1083b; cf. 1375b, 1692b) | xSxxSx |
| ‘and sat beside him’ | |
| (e) <i>þat halle ful hy3e</i> (794b) | xSxxSx |
| ‘that hall high up’ | |

The verses like (35a) have OV order, with a finite verb in line-final position and its prominent object on the alliterating lift. The preferred scansion is obtained for (35a) by replacing manuscript *audenture* with a short variant *aunter* that appears elsewhere in the poem.⁹⁵ A quasi-auxiliary follows its governed infinitive in (35b), providing trochaic closure with phrase-final stress. In (35c), an alliterating preposition stands before the verb. Here archaic syntax removes monosyllabic *hem* from the end of the verse and *were* acquires trochaic value with phrase-final stress. In the variants like (35d), a postposition acquires phrase-final stress to provide trochaic closure and its monosyllabic pronoun object adds crucially to the long dip. An archaic noun-adjective construction appears in (35e), where semantically inessential *ful* ekes out the required long dip.

Among hypermetrical b-verses with alliteration on both lifts are nine instances with archaic word order.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------|
| (36) | (a) <i>quat hit mene my3t[e]</i> (233b; cf. 657b, 2289b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘what it might mean’ | |
| | (b) <i>as I þe habbe here</i> (1252b) | xxxSxSx |
| | ‘as I have you here’ | |
| | (c) <i>in his bonde haldez</i> (436b; cf. 437b, 2110b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘holds in his hand’ | |
| | (d) <i>on lyft half he haldez</i> (698b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘he keeps on his left side’ | |
| | (e) <i>a myst-hakel huge</i> (2081b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘a huge mist-cloak’ | |

In the verses like (36a), an auxiliary verb acquires clause-final stress to provide trochaic closure and the more prominent infinitive alliterates on the first lift. OV order avoids two long dips in (36b). In the verses like (36c), a prepositional phrase in archaic position yields a long dip of the preferred disyllabic size and matches the prominence of stressed words to the prominence of lifts. Archaic order places the trochaic word at the end of the verse in (36d). Item (36e) has archaic placement of the noun and adjective. Normal order in (36e) would place the secondary constituent of a compound at the end of the b-verse. This is an acceptable option but less desirable, apparently, than ending the b-verse with an independent trochaic word.

5.12 Verses with Alliteration on the Second Lift Only

A metrist who employs categorical rules should be prepared to explain how apparent exceptions could have found their way into a manuscript. The best theoretical practice, I think, is to contrive remedies for as many exceptions as possible and see what generalizations develop. Where traditional poems like SGGK are concerned, an ideal emendation will exploit strategies used elsewhere to avoid the metrical problem under scrutiny. The poet's formulaic diction often provides just one or two semantically inessential choices for alliteration with a given word. If an alliterating word has been omitted, an appropriate candidate may be easy to find.⁹⁶ Ideally, formulaic emendations will sort into a few characteristic types that point toward likely kinds of scribal error or misguided correction. I illustrate this approach for b-verses in SGGK with the only alliteration on the second lift.

Some apparent exceptions look like trivialized b-verses that had double alliteration originally, with the first alliteration on an archaic synonym, a dialectal variant, or a semantically inessential word vulnerable to omission.

- | | | |
|------|---|-----------------|
| (37) | (a) <i>bi hym þat me wrozt[e]</i> (399b) | *xxxxSx |
| | ‘by him who created me’ | |
| | (b) <i>#bi hym þat wizes wrozt[e]</i> | xxxSxSx |
| | ‘by him who created men’ | |
| | (c) <i>þat he hit take wolde</i> (1835b) | *xxxxxSx |
| | ‘that he would take it’ | |
| | (d) <i>Ðat wyl I welde wyth guod wyll</i> (2430a) | xxxSxxxSx |
| | ‘that I will possess (i.e., take) with good will’ | |
| | (e) <i>#þat he hit welde wolde</i> | xxxSxSx |
| | (f) <i>quyle þat hem lyked</i> (1115b) | *xxxxSx |
| | ‘while it seemed pleasant to them’ | |
| | (g) <i>Hir schal lyke þat layk</i> (C 1064a) | xxSxxS (type B) |
| | ‘That sport will seem pleasant to her’ | |
| | (h) <i>#quyle hem þat layk lyked</i> | xxxSsx (type C) |
| | ‘while that sport seemed pleasant to them’ | |

From a Middle English perspective there are two problems with the metrical pattern of (37a). Its four-syllable dip violates rule 5 and it lacks the required second lift. On our hypothesis of continuous development, a b-verse like (37a) would be very difficult to explain. The only origin for such a variant would be Old English type A3, a type restricted to the a-verse (section 3.12). All verse types reliably attested in SGGK are placed where they would be appropriate in *Beowulf*. Emendation to something like (37b) seems indicated.⁹⁷ Prosaic *take* in (37c) might be a trivialization of *welde*,

which can mean ‘have, take,’ as in (37d), where the context is similar. Emended to (37e), the verse has a common hypermetrical pattern. Semantically inessential *layk* might have been omitted from (37f). Compare (37g), where *layk* alliterates with *lyke* in the same construction. Emended to (37h), the verse scans as an ordinary type C variant with an initial dip reducible to three syllables by elision (or the *-e* of high-frequency *quyle* might simply have been unrealized in the dip). Loss of *welde* and *layk* could have begun with *haplology*. These words are quite similar to the words that immediately follow them.

In considering archaic and rhetorical word orders, we have encountered syntactic trivialization – substitution by the scribe of ordinary syntax for poetic syntax. Some apparent instances of single alliteration on the last lift can be remedied by a simple change in word order.

- (38) (a) *3if 3e hade goud chepez* (1939b) *xxxxxSx
 ‘if you got good bargains’
 (b) *#3if 3e goud chepez hade* (cf. C 1447b) xxxSxSx
 (c) *þat oþer on rolled* (953b) *xxxxxSx
 ‘hung loosely on the other (woman)’
 (d) *#rolled on þat oþer* SxxxSx

Item (38a) looks like a trivialization of the OV word order in (38b), where the vague intensifier *goud* occupies the initial dip and high-frequency *hade* provides trochaic closure with phrase-final stress.⁹⁸ Similar exceptions are eliminated if we restore constructions used elsewhere for their metrical value.⁹⁹ A rare kind of anomaly is (38c), an unacceptable verse with archaic word order that scans normally with modern word order. Perhaps the scribe’s eye skipped to *on rayled* in the line above while copying (38c).

The *Gawain* poet often obtains trochaic closure by replacing a prosaic monosyllable with a less common disyllabic synonym. Items (39a) and (39d) look like trivialized verses in which this procedure had originally been followed.

- (39) (a) *I may not forsake* (475b) *xxxxSx
 ‘I may not forsake’
 (b) *#I may forsake [neuer]* xxxSxSx
 (c) *faylez þou neuer* (455b) SxxSx
 ‘you will never fail’
 (d) *þer he forth hy3ez* (1462b) *xxxSx
 ‘where he hastens forth’
 (e) *#þer he hy3ez [fyrre]* (cf. 2151b) xxSxSx

In (39a), the lack of a second lift is aggravated by violation of rule 5. This might be emended to something like (39b), which adopts the construction in (39c). A change in word order and replacement of *forth* with *fyrre*

‘farther’ transforms (39d) into (39e), which has the most common hypermetrical pattern. A few other verses yield to similar emendations.¹⁰⁰

Simple omission of a semantically inessential word seems likely in (40a), (40c), and (40e).

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (40) | (a) <i>watz not þe last[e]</i> (1133b) | *xxxSx |
| | ‘was not the last’ | |
| | (b) <i>#watz not þe last[e] [þenne]</i> (cf. 1649b) | xxxSxSx |
| | (c) <i>whenso mon lykez</i> (1682b) | *xxxSx |
| | ‘whenever one likes’ | |
| | (d) <i>#whenso mon lykez [better]</i> (cf. 1782b) | xxxSxSx |
| | (e) <i>on þe bed-syde</i> (1193b) | *xxxSx |
| | ‘on the bedside’ | |
| | (f) <i>#on þe bed-syde [syþen]</i> (cf. <i>Erkenwald</i> 260) | xxxSxSx |

Semantically inessential *þenne*, *better*, and *syþen* transform these exceptions into ordinary hypermetrical b-verses. The emendation in (40f) has alliteration on both lifts, which is permissible in SGGK.

More complex emendations seem to be required for the remaining manuscript verses that alliterate on the last lift only.

- | | | |
|------|--|--------|
| (41) | (a) <i>neuer bot trifel</i> (547b) | *xxxSx |
| | ‘never except for a trifle’ | |
| | (b) <i>#bot trifel [hit were]</i> | xSxxSx |
| | (c) <i>bot ferly hit were</i> (716b) | xSxxSx |
| | ‘unless it were extraordinary’ | |
| | (d) <i>as I tryst may</i> (380b) | *xxSx |
| | ‘which I may believe’ | |
| | (e) <i>#as I tryst m[oste]</i> | xxSSx |
| | ‘which I should believe’ | |
| | (f) <i>þat þay seuer moste</i> (1958b) | xxSxSx |
| | ‘that they should part’ | |

Although the construction in (41a) may seem odd to the modern reader, it probably seemed more idiomatic to the scribe than the archaic construction in (41b), which is attested for example in (41c). Since it ends in a monosyllable, (41d) will not do as a b-verse. In (41e), *may* is emended to *moste*, which has the required trochaic pattern. Item (41f) illustrates use of *moste* to perform this function. Difference in meaning is slight. With the emendation compare Modern English *Why should I believe that?*

5.13 Summary

From an uncontroversial, purely descriptive point of view, Middle English b-verses discussed in this chapter can be represented by the abstract schema

(x)Sx(x)Sx, where the parenthesized (x) positions are sometimes left empty and sometimes filled by syllables with weak stress or zero stress. When the first (x) position is filled for the required long dip, the first stressed word almost always has a trochaic pattern. When the second (x) position is filled, the first stressed word is often monosyllabic. These metrical facts are explained if the schema covers two distinct types, one evolved from an Old English hypermetrical b-verse and the other from Old English type A1. Here as in other cases the longer dip evolves from the more tolerant Old English dip, which is the verse-initial dip in hypermetrical b-verses and the medial dip in type A1. Progressive stages in evolution of the two types can be observed in late Old English poetry and in the Old Saxon *Heliand*.

The *Gawain* poet uses semantically inessential words to satisfy alliterative requirements and to construct mandatory long dips. These formulaic constituents are employed frequently but with taste and have positive aesthetic effects within the poem as a whole. The difference between “to buy” and “to buy with pennies” may not be significant in the immediate context of verse 79b, but accumulation of such concrete detail makes for vivid narration with a compelling reality effect.¹⁰¹ The reality effect can actually be enhanced when concrete details are inessential.¹⁰² As with formal elements generally, formulaic elements can promote extended meditation on important themes. Traditional formulas situate SGGK emphatically within its genre and facilitate comparison of Gawain with knights in other medieval romances.

In European literary culture, techniques of metrical emendation were invented for gravely serious poems like Homer’s *Iliad* or Vergil’s *Aeneid*, poems composed in highly respected literary dialects employing meters that were widely understood. Departures from the original language of such poems would naturally be restricted in the work of competent scribes. SGGK is quite different. Though it has its serious moments, it is a lighthearted poem overall, contrasting in this respect even with *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*.¹⁰³ In Middle English manuscript culture there was widespread hostility toward the native diction of alliterative poetry.¹⁰⁴ Given such hostility, we should not expect scribes to treat native diction with respect.¹⁰⁵ The London dialect of Chaucer was standard in the fourteenth century.¹⁰⁶ In *The Reeve’s Tale*, Chaucer uses a variety of non-standard northern forms for characters of little wit.¹⁰⁷ The reeve’s comedy of errors takes place, he informs us, “Fer in the north, I can nat telle where” (line 4015). Respectful treatment of the *Gawain* poet’s dialect cannot be assumed.

SGGK survives in a single manuscript written by a single scribe who was not prone to careless errors and whose dialect was not significantly different

from the author's, though the poem has passed through at least one stage of revision by a scribe with a slightly different dialect.¹⁰⁸ It might seem presumptuous to emend the work of competent scribes with close linguistic kinship to the author. Established findings of sociolinguistics suggest otherwise, however, in cases where the shared idiom bears a social stigma. In his research on American dialects, the founder of sociolinguistics discovered that "those who used the highest percentage of a stigmatized form in casual speech were the most sensitive in stigmatizing it in the speech of others."¹⁰⁹ Mainstream literary attitudes acquired during scribal apprenticeship might well lead to reflexive distaste for semantically inessential constituents and insouciance about the results of omitting them. The kind of discipline imposed by published rules of dactylic hexameter would not have influenced transmission of SGGK. Even a scribe who admired the narrative might feel obliged to "improve" or simplify its language. Some such explanation seems to be required for the peculiar metrical anomalies of SGGK, which can usually be remedied by formulaic techniques used elsewhere under the same metrical conditions. Having mastered a comprehensive technology of verse construction, an accomplished formulaic poet would not likely refuse, on some sort of whim, to employ a general solution for the problem at hand, letting a verse stand as anomalous.¹¹⁰ Finding just the right emendation can be challenging, but verses requiring emendation are not especially difficult to identify.

Type A₁ in the A-Verse

6.1 Old English Prototypes

In the a-verse, type A₁ permits a long dip between lifts and also in anacrusis before the first lift (section 3.4). Dips in anacrusis are limited to two syllables. Longer dips sometimes occur between lifts, as in item (1a).

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|----------------|
| (1) | (a) | <i>(ne ge)feah hē / (þāēre) fūhðe</i> (Beo 109a; cf. 1711a)
‘he had no joy of that feud’ | (xx)S:x/(xx)Sx |
| | (b) | <i>Oueral, as I here</i> (G 630a)
‘everywhere, as I hear’ | xxSxxSx |
| | (c) | <i>At þe last, when hit watz late</i> (G 1027a)
‘at the end, when it was late’ | xxSxxxSx |
| | (d) | <i>After þe sesoun of somer</i> (G 516a)
‘after the season of summer’ | xxxSxxSx |

Both variants like (1a) have a long dip in anacrusis and a trisyllabic medial dip. They are the only A₁ variants with a long dip in both permissible locations.¹ Although A₁ variants with two long dips are rare, all variants with anacrusis are rare and (1a) does not stand out among them as anomalous. A₁ variants with anacrusis offered two locations for unstressed function words and had become nearly routine in the late Old English *Maldon* (sections 4.5–6). By the fourteenth century, type A₁ a-verses with two long dips, which contrasted effectively with the b-verse, had evolved from marginal to optimal. Items (1b–d) represent the most common a-verse patterns in SGGK: xxSxxSx, xxSxxxSx, and xxxSxxSx. The first two patterns have precedents in *Beowulf*, but the third exceeds the old limit of two syllables for the initial dip.

6.2 Distribution of A₁ Variants in the Middle English A-Verse

Table 6.1 shows the distribution of type A₁ a-verses in the corpus of limited ambiguity. Variants with unusual alliterative patterns are excluded for

Table 6.1 *Dip Structures for Type A1 A-Verses in the Smaller Corpus (182 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4	5	6
initial						
↓						
0		2	3	9		1
1	2	13	13	8	4	
2	5	34	26	3	1	
3	3	39	12	2		
4	1	1				

Table 6.2 *Dip Structures for Type A1 A-Verses in the Larger Corpus (574 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4	5	6(+)
initial						
↓						
0		3	6	20	3	2
1	2	24	12	47	16	3
2	7	147	72	8	3	
3	6	133	38	3		
4	8	6	3			
5		1	1			

separate discussion. Verses with routine editorial improvements are now included in the corpus.

The contrast with Table 5.3 is stark. In the b-verse, few instances of type A1 have two long dips or an ultralong dip. Plausible emendations are available for most of them. In the a-verse, the most common variants have two long dips or an ultralong dip.

Table 6.2 shows the distribution of type A1 a-verses in the larger corpus, employing the provisional scansion procedure (section 5.5). Since contrast with the b-verse is highly valued, I assume that weak *e* is always realized to provide a second long dip or to provide an ultralong dip when no other long dip is present. I obtain additional long dips by replacing *-ly* with *lych(e)* and by replacing shorter forms of unstressed words with longer ones.²

Frequencies in Table 6.1 are skewed by exclusion of instances with weak *-e* in a prominent word. In Table 6.2, the variant with a 2/2 dip structure, which has an Old English precedent, now outnumbers the 3/2 variant, which has no Old English precedent. The preference for an ultra-long dip in variants with no other long dip stands out more clearly in Table 6.2, where the 0/4 and 1/4 variants have the highest frequencies in their rows and the 4/1 variant has the highest frequency in its column. Many asymmetries emerge when we compare Table 6.2 with Table 5.4. In the a-verse, the variants with no initial dip have a frequency of only 6 percent (33/574), as compared with 24 percent for the b-verses (386/1,628). In type A1 b-verses, dips of four or more syllables, which violate Inoue's law, occur with a frequency of .01 percent (2/1,628). The corresponding frequency for the a-verse is 21 percent (124/574). The most common dip structures in the b-verse, 0/2, 0/3, 1/2, and 1/3, have dramatically lower frequencies in the a-verse. Verse-pattern overlap may be tolerable in the a-verse but it adds to complexity and restricts frequency. The principle of closure rules out this kind of complexity in the b-verse, where the most common a-verse patterns are excluded without exception.

The most common a-verse variant, with a 2/2 dip structure, has a frequency of 26 percent (147/574). In the era of sggk, an Old English variant excluded from the b-verse had become the most common variant in the a-verse. Most variants in Table 6.2 conform to the Old English limit of two syllables for verse-initial dips in type A1 (dips in anacrusis). Extension of the initial dip beyond the old limit has clearly become acceptable, however. Variants with a 3/2 dip structure, which are unacceptable in *Beowulf*, outnumber variants with a 2/3 dip structure, which are rare but acceptable in *Beowulf*. Late Old English poems employed innovative kinds of anacrusis but continued to observe the two-syllable limit. Extension beyond this limit probably occurred after the principle of asymmetry was established. Since an initial dip in the b-verse usually has one or two syllables, an initial dip of three syllables provides useful contrast in the a-verse.

The principle of closure restricts non-traditional dip structures to the a-verse. All b-verse patterns have Old English precedents.

6.3 Alliteration in the Dip

In the type A1 a-verse, which has two alliterating lifts, a third alliteration will occupy a dip. Constituents with intermediate stress that alliterate in the dip are underlined in (2a–f).

- (2)
- | | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| (a) | <i>And his arsounz <u>al</u> after</i> (171a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘and his saddle-bows entirely similar’ | |
| (b) | <i>Oft leud[e]lez alone</i> (693a) | xSxxxSx |
| | ‘often companionless alone’ | |
| (c) | <i>Quen he hef up his helme</i> (826a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘when he lifted up his helmet’ | |
| (d) | <i>Summe soþen, summe_in sewe</i> (892a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | ‘some boiled, some in stew’ | |
| (e) | <i>And heuen hit <u>vp</u> al hole</i> (1346a) | xSxxxxSx |
| | ‘and lifted it up entirely whole’ | |
| (f) | <i>Pat watz furred ful fyne</i> (1737a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘that was superbly lined with fur’ | |

The constituents alliterating in the dip have high frequency in the natural language and correspondingly low prominence. They include pronominal *summe*, the verbal particle *vp*, and two intensifying adverbs, *al* and *ful*. The suffix *-lez* in (2b) has even lower prominence and would be easy to identify as an occupant of the dip. Some apparent examples of type A₁ in the a-verse have a third alliteration on a more prominent constituent. These will be analyzed as variants of type A₂ or type D. As we shall see, a secondary lift is available for the third alliteration in these types.

6.4 Archaic Syntax in the Type A₁ A-Verse

Order of Verb and Object

VO constructions predominate in the Middle English a-verse. In SGGK, fifty-four type A₁ a-verses contain a finite main verb that *alliterates* before its object, something that rarely happens in *Beowulf*.³

- (3)
- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| (a) | <i>Pat vphaldez þe heuen</i> (2442a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘who holds up heaven’ | |
| (b) | <i>*Pat þe heuen vphaldez</i> | xxSxxSx |
| (c) | <i>iapez þer maden</i> (542b) | SxxSx |
| | ‘made jests there’ | |
| (d) | <i>All(e) þat e(ue)r ber[e] bugle</i> (1913a) | xxxSxSx |
| | ‘all that ever bore (a) bugle’ | |
| (e) | <i>#All(e) þat bugle_euer ber[e]</i> | xxSxxSx |
| (f) | <i>Fyrst I eþe þe, hæpel</i> (379a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘first I conjure you, knight’ | |
| (g) | <i>Techez hym to þe tayles</i> (1377a) | SxxxxSx |
| | ‘directs him to the tails’ | |

A typical example is (3a), with the verb and its noun object alliterating. Archaic syntax would serve no purpose in (3b), which has the same metrical pattern as (3a). There are no a-verses in the poem like (3b). Though most useful in b-verses with a single alliterating word – (3c), for example – OV word order is sometimes useful in the a-verse. As it stands in the manuscript, (3d) looks like a hypermetrical b-verse. This might be a trivialization of (3e), where restoration of OV syntax yields the most common a-verse pattern. Among the clear cases with VO syntax, twenty-one have an alliterating finite verb followed by a pronoun object in the dip. The pronoun object can enhance contrast with the b-verse by creating a second long dip, as in (3f), or an ultralong medial dip, as in (3g).

A pronoun object stands before the finite verb in fourteen instances.⁴

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|------------|
| (4) | (a) | <i>And he baldly hym bydez</i> (376a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘and he boldly awaits him’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Forþi me for to fynde_if þou fraystez</i> (455a) | xxxxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘therefore if you try to find me’ | |
| | (c) | <i>#Me to fynde_if þou fraystez</i> | xxSxxSx |

In the a-verse, OV order often removes a monosyllabic pronoun from final position, as in (4a), where the pronoun creates a second long dip, enhancing asymmetry with the b-verse. Placing the object pronoun after the verb would create an unusual realization of type Db, which has much lower frequency overall than type A1. Item (4b) has a doubly archaic construction with the object pronoun before its governor *fynde* and *fynde* before its governor *fraystez*. If genuine, (4b) would be one of just two instances with five syllables in the initial dip. SOV word order usually improves the meter in obvious ways. Use of a doubly archaic construction to create an unusual variant seems unlikely. As emended in (4c), the verse has the most common a-verse pattern.

Placement of Adpositions

Some archaic constructions with adpositional phrases appear in type A1 a-verses.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|-----------|
| (5) | (a) | <i>Þat vnder heuen I hope</i> (352a; cf. 451a) | xxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘that I expect (to find) under heaven’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Whil mony so bold(e) yow aboute</i> (351a; cf. 694a, 1704a) | xxxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘while many so bold about you’ | |

The variants like (5a) have a prepositional phrase before the finite verb. Semantically inessential *vnder heuen* provides a second long dip in (5a) along with a second alliteration. The variants like (5b) have postpositional

phrases with pronoun objects. Like other archaic constructions, **postpositional** phrases can keep monosyllabic pronouns out of final position.⁵

Order of Verb and Subject

Rhetorical VS orders do metrical work in type A1 a-verses. There are eleven instances like (6a), with VSO word order and a pronoun subject.⁶

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| (6) | (a) <i>Per asyngnes he a seruaunt</i> (1971a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | ‘there he assigns a servant’ | |
| | (b) <i>Penne sesed hym þe syre</i> (1083a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | ‘then the lord took him’ | |
| | (c) <i>Hit is soth(e), quop þe segge</i> (1637a) | xxSxxSx |
| | “‘It is true,” said the knight’ | |
| | (d) <i>Nay, as help me, quop þe habel</i> (256a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | “‘No, so help me,” said the knight’ | |
| | (e) <i>And þus 3irnez þe 3ere</i> (529a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘and thus passes the year’ | |
| | (f) <i>#Penne lyst[e] þe lady</i> (941a) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘then the lady desired’ | |
| | (g) <i>#Now [I] know wel þy cosses</i> (2360a, < know I) | xxSxxSx |
| | ‘now I know well thy kisses’ | |
| | (h) <i>Nade he ben dūzty and dryze</i> (724a; cf. 1269a) | xxxSxxSx |
| | ‘had he not been doughty and enduring’ | |

Item (6b) has rhetorical VOS word order. Verbs of speaking occur in thirteen VS instances similar to (6c), where *quop þe segge* provides a second long dip and a second alliteration.⁷ The poet’s hoard of synonyms for ‘man’ adapts such phrases to varying alliterative requirements, as in (6d). In 5 variants like (6e), VS order transforms the pattern xxxSxSx, which is characteristic of the b-verse, into the pattern xxSxxSx, the most common a-verse pattern.⁸ Realization of past tense *-e* as a metrical syllable supplies a second long dip for the VS construction in item (6f). VS order seems to be favored after an adverb in SGGK for non-metrical reasons. In item (6g), the scribe may have substituted this Middle English order for an order more familiar to the modern reader. As emended, (6g) has the most common a-verse pattern. Two verses like (6h) employ a construction that still translates plausibly with auxiliary-subject order, in writing if not in ordinary conversation.

Order of Noun and Adjective

In the a-verse, where both adjective and noun normally **alliterate**, archaic order would often leave the metrical pattern unchanged. Item (7a) is the

only clear case with a noun followed directly by its modifying adjective. If the order of noun and adjective were reversed in (7a), the unstressed prefix of *unblype* would no longer provide a second long dip and elision of -y in *mony* would reduce the initial dip to three syllables, removing the only other possibility of contrast with the b-verse.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|-------------------|
| (7) | (a) | <i>With mony bryddez unblype</i> (G 746a) | xxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘with many unhappy birds’ | |
| | (b) | <i>On mony bonkkes ful brode</i> (G 14a) | xxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘on many very broad shores’ | |
| | (c) | <i>When burnez blype</i> (G 922a) | *xSxSx |
| | | ‘when merry men’ | |
| | (d) | <i>#When mony burnez ful blype</i> | xxxSxxSx |
| | (e) | <i>in ðām sele</i> (Beo 2139a) | (no alliteration) |
| | | ‘in that hall’ | |
| | (f) | <i>in þæm / gūðsele</i> (Beo 443a) | (x)x/Ssx (type C) |
| | | ‘in that war-hall’ | |

Semantically inessential *mony* contributes a long initial dip in (7a–b). Semantically inessential *ful* contributes a second long dip in (7b). These formulaic strategies show up in several verse types. Their systematic use justifies emending (7c), which lacks a long dip, to (7d), which has a common A1 pattern. Semantically inessential words that improve the meter are particularly vulnerable to omission. Compare item (7e) from the *Beowulf* manuscript, which lacks the required alliteration on *g*. In the standard edition, *sele* is emended to *gūð-sele* ‘war-hall.’ Item (7f) provides a formulaic parallel for addition of semantically inessential *gūð* to (7e).⁹

Predicate Adjective Constructions

In type A1 a-verses, the Gawain poet normally uses the modern order of copula and adjective. Item (8a) is typical, with the copula *watz* before the adjective *hyȝ*.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|----------|
| (8) | (a) | <i>Hit watz hyȝ(e) on his hede</i> (607a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘it was high on his head’ | |
| | (b) | <i>#Paȝ (hit) unworþi [hit] were</i> (1835a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘though it might be unworthy’ | |
| | (c) | <i>More sem[e]ly hit were</i> (1198b) | xxSxxxSx |
| | | ‘it would be more seemly’ | |
| | (d) | <i>#(Wel) [Swyþe] gay watz þis gome</i> (179a; cf. 1835a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘this man was very handsome’ | |

Items (8b) and (8d) are the only type A1 a-verses with the copula in archaic position. Both verses seem to have undergone partial modernization by the scribe. In (8b), placing the subject *hit* after the predicate adjective transforms a hypermetrical b-verse pattern into the most common a-verse pattern. Item (8c) illustrates use of this construction elsewhere in the poem. Replacing *wel* with archaic *swyþe* yields the most common a-verse pattern in (8d).

Ordering of Adverbs

Alliterating adverbs precede the finite main verb in just four a-verses. There are three like item (9a), with an *-ly* suffix on the adverb.¹⁰

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|----------|
| (9) | (a) | <i>Penne fersly þay flokked</i> (1323a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘then they assembled proudly’ | |
| | (b) | <i>And sy(þe)n riche forth runnen</i> (66a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘and then nobles ran forth’ | |
| | (c) | <i>And he 3elde hit yow 3are</i> (2410a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘and may he grant it to you fully’ | |
| | (d) | <i>And lenged þer(e) selly longe</i> (1194a) | xSxxxxSx |
| | | ‘and lingered there remarkably long’ | |

In (9a), *fersly* provides a second alliterating syllable and its suffix adds crucially to a second long dip. In eight instances like (9b), a high-frequency adverb in the dip precedes the finite main verb. The adverb is semantically inessential in (9b) and in two other instances where it contributes a second long dip or makes the only long dip ultralong.¹¹ An adverb alliterates after an alliterating finite verb in four a-verses, of which three are like (9c), with a semantically inessential adverb providing the second alliteration.¹² In eight a-verses like (9d), with modern word order, an adverb stands in the medial dip before an adjective or another adverb. In these a-verses the adverb is semantically inessential and usually adds significant contrast with the b-verse.¹³ Movable adverbs play an important role in the formulaic technique of SGGK.

6.5 Origins of Alliterative Requirements for the Middle English A-Verse

Our survey of archaic word orders has turned up formulaic techniques that provide alliteration on both lifts, which is mandatory in the Middle English a-verse. At first glance, the Middle English requirement looks like a major innovation. In *Beowulf*, many type A1 a-verses have single

alliteration. The contrast practically disappears, however, when we consider the frequency of double alliteration in Old English ancestors of the Middle English variants that survived.

(10)	(a)	<i>billum</i> / (<i>ond</i>) <i>byrnum</i> (Beo 40a)	Sx/(x)Sx	120:5 (96%)
		‘with swords and mailcoats’		
	(b)	<i>wunder</i> / (<i>æfter</i>) <i>wundre</i> (Beo 931a)	Sx/(xx)Sx	40:0 (100%)
		‘wonder after wonder’		
	(c)	(<i>Ā</i>) <i>rās þā</i> / (<i>se</i>) <i>rīca</i> (Beo 399a)	(x)Sx/(x)Sx ¹⁴	31:4 (89%)
		‘then the great man arose’		
	(d)	(<i>ne ge</i>) <i>feah hē</i> (<i>þære</i>) <i>fīehðe</i> (Beo 109a)	xx//Sx/(xx)Sx	3:0 (100%)
		‘he had no joy of the feud’		

Within the Old English system, the metrical simplicity of two-word type A₁ makes a demarcative second alliteration unnecessary. As we have seen (section 3.4), single alliteration often occurs in this direct realization of the type. Two-word type A₁ does not survive in sGGK, which requires at least one long dip in all variants. When a non-prefixal function word is added to the medial dip, as in (10a), the frequency of double alliteration rises to 96 percent in *Beowulf*. This kind of **long dip** became the norm in type A₁ a-verses after prefixes declined in frequency and lost their value as the least disruptive **extrametrical** words. Among the thirty-four Middle English variants with no initial dip, three are comparable to (10a), with two syllables in the medial dip, and the other thirty-one are comparable to (10b), with three or more syllables in the medial dip (see Table 6.2). For the ancestral Old English variant (10b), the frequency of double alliteration is 100 percent. Most type A₁ a-verses have an initial dip in sGGK. Among Old English precursors with a short initial dip (monosyllabic **anacrusis**), at least 89 percent have double alliteration, like (10c). The instances with single alliteration are doubtful.¹⁵ All a-verse instances like (10d), with a long initial dip, have double alliteration in *Beowulf*. A long initial dip is usually present in Middle English type A₁ a-verses. With two-word realizations eliminated, the surviving A₁ variants provided very few precedents with single alliteration in the a-verse. As the **principle of asymmetry** developed, double alliteration acquired added value as an element of contrast with the b-verse. Mandatory double alliteration in the type A₁ a-verse clarified the metrical structure of the **line** with little added effort.

6.6 Apparent Examples with Alliteration on the First Lift Only

The word at the end of a type A₁ a-verse bears phrase-final stress and normally alliterates. Apparent examples with single alliteration are not

likely to be authentic. In this section we consider emendations for all of them.

Five examples with single alliteration look like trivialized variants in which a poetic usage had provided the second alliteration.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|----------|
| (11) | (a) | <i>3e schal not rise_of your [rest]</i> (1223a, < <i>bedde</i>) | xxxSxxS |
| | | ‘you shall not rise from your bed’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Wat chaunce so [acheves]</i> (1406a, < <i>bytydes</i>) | xSxxxSx |
| | | ‘whatsoever chance thus provides’ | |
| | (c) | <i>#In any grounde_[under God]</i> (705a, < <i>peraboute</i> , cf. 2470a) | xxxSxxS |
| | | ‘in any region under God’ | |
| | (d) | <i>#Iwysse sir, quyl I [wone]</i> (1035a, < <i>leue</i> , cf. 814b) | xSxxxxSx |
| | | ‘indeed, sir, while I live’ | |
| | (e) | <i>#[Chose] yow per(e) my cheuicaunc(e)</i> (1390a, < <i>Tas</i> , cf. 863b) | SxxxxSxs |
| | | ‘take there my merchandise’ | |

In (11a–b), Putter and Stokes emend *bedde* to *rest* and *bytydes* to *acheves*. Similar improvements yield a second alliteration in (11c–e).

A semantically inessential word seems to have been omitted from a few manuscript instances with single alliteration.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|----------|
| (12) | (a) | <i>#D(o)welle,_and ellez [dere]ly</i> (1082a; cf. 1253a) | SxxxSxs |
| | | ‘stay, and also courteously (carry out)’ | |
| | (b) | <i>#Pe stif mon [stille]_hym bifore</i> (332a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | | ‘The stout man (stood) quietly before him’ | |
| | (c) | <i>#To nye_hym [onewe]_on-ferum</i> (1575a) | xSxxSxxs |
| | | ‘to attack him again from a distance’ | |

As emended, (12a) scans normally as type Db. The emendation involves moving *do* to the b-verse, where it creates an acceptable type A1 pattern. As they stand in the manuscript, (12b–c) have alliterative and metrical patterns characteristic of the b-verse, a dubious kind of double *overlap*. As emended, (12b–c) scan as hypermetrical a-verses. The same kind of remedy is available for other exceptions.¹⁶

More complex emendations seem necessary for the remaining exceptions.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|------------|
| (13) | (a) | <i>#Pen carppez [clanly] to (Sir) Gawan</i> (377a) | xSxSxxSx |
| | | ‘Then (the Green Knight) speaks eloquently to Gawain’ | |
| | (b) | <i>#[Bi Kryst.] pe knyzt of pe (grene) chapel</i> (454a) | xSxSxxSx |
| | | ‘By Christ, (they call me) the knight of the chapel’ | |
| | (c) | <i>And þat hatz wayned me (hider), wiz[e]</i> (264a) | xxxSxxSx |
| | | ‘and that has brought me, sir’ | |
| | (d) | <i>#And (þenne he) [warly] wayted him aboute</i> (2163a; cf. 1186a) | xSxSxxxxSx |
| | | ‘and looked alertly about him’ | |
| | (e) | <i>Now [in fayþ]all(e) þes(e) fyue syþez, (for soþe)</i> (656a) | xxSxxSxxs |
| | | ‘now in faith all these five cases’ | |

- (f) #*Syþen rytte þay [redly] þe (foure) lymmes* (I332a) xxSxxSxxSx
 ‘then neatly they cut the limbs’
- (g) #*And þat is þe best, be my (dome) [blysse]* (I216a; cf. C 177) xxxSxxSxxSx
 ‘and that is best, by my bliss’

Emendation of these verses involves removal of some words and addition or substitution of semantically inessential material. *Sir* is removed from (I3a) and semantically inessential *clanly* is added. Removal of *grene* causes no semantic problems in (I3b) because the green chapel has been mentioned three lines previously and *þe chapel* would be understood appropriately in context. Items (I3c–d) remove unstressed idiomatic words and supply formulaic alliteration. Item (I3e) replaces *for soþe* with *in fayþ* ‘in faith’ and moves this semantically inessential phrase. Items (I3f) and (I3g) replace words in the manuscript with other words that are not synonymous.

6.7 Apparent Examples with Alliteration on the Second Lift Only

In SGGK we find some manuscript a-verses with the only alliteration on a verse-final Sx word.

- (14) (a) *Ledes hym to his awen chambre* (1030a)
 ‘leads him to his own chamber’
- (b) [*Charr*]es hym to his awen *chambre*
- (c) *Then(ne) comaunded þe [syre]_in þat sale* (I372a < *lorde*)
 ‘then the lord commanded (his retainers to gather) in that hall’
- (d) [*Yonde*] he watz *ʒayned* (1724a, < *Loude*)
 ‘there he was greeted’
- (e) *En[ui]re[n]ed vpon veluet* (2027a, < *Ennurned*)
 ‘decorated on velvet’
- (f) #*For þat watz [re]corded þe renoun* (2519a, < *acorded*)
 ‘Because of that the renown (of the Round Table) was rehearsed’
- (g) #*Watz [Wawan] neuer in þis worlde* (2321a, < *he*)
 ‘Gawain was never in this world (so happy a man)’

Although there are no traditional precedents in the b-verse, we do find such variants in the Old English a-verse (type A₃, section 3.12). In the Middle English a-verse, however, type A₃ would violate the new metrical constant of two primary lifts. Putter and Stokes emend (I4a) by substituting *charres* for prosaic *ledes* ‘leads,’ creating (I4b), a type A₁ variant with an ultralong medial dip. Similar emendations in (I4c–d) are also by Putter and Stokes. The emendation in (I4e) assumes a plausible confusion of letters.¹⁷ Following Putter and Stokes, I assume that type A₃ had gone extinct by the fourteenth century and offer emendations for apparent examples. Item (I4f) assumes an inauthentic choice of prefix by the scribe. Item (I4g)

illustrates the kind of **trivialization** that replaces the poet's noun with a prosaic pronoun.

Some apparent exceptions seem to result from omission of a semantically inessential word.

- (15) (a) *Bot I wyl [chose] to þe chapel* (2132a) xxxSxxxSx
 'but I will go to the chapel'
 (b) *Bot þat 3e be Gawan, [ungayn]* (1293a) xxxxSxxS
 'but that you might be Gawain, not readily (can I believe)'
 (c) *#He sayd(e), [wi3e,] 3e ar welcum* (835a; cf. 252a) xxSxxxSx
 'he said, "sir, you are welcome"'

The emendations in (15a–b) are by Putter and Stokes. In (15b), the added word might be necessary for semantic as well as metrical reasons. In a few similar cases like (15c), semantically inessential words create a common type A1 variant.¹⁸

A few apparent exceptions seem to result from omission of a small semantically inessential phrase.

- (16) (a) *Hit watz þe ladi, loflyest [on lyve] to beholde* (1187)
 'It was the lady, the loveliest (one) alive to behold'
 (b) *#Sy(þe)n [wyþ mournyng] fro þe meyny* (1983a; cf. 543a) xxSxxxSx
 'then with mourning from the household'
 (c) *#Lo! þer þe falssyng [and folé]* (2378a; cf. Pa 283) xxxSxxSx
 'Lo! there (is) the falsehood and folly'

Putter and Stokes add a traditional formulaic phrase to the b-verse in (16a), relocating *loflyest* to the a-verse, where it provides the second alliteration. Like item (16b), verse 543a also uses *wyþ mournyng* to indicate that Gawain was (predictably) distressed while performing the narrated action. In (16c), *folé* would appropriately characterize Gawain's deceit as a foolish one. As emended, (16b–c) scan as ordinary type A1 variants. Similar emendations are available in a few other cases.¹⁹

Some exceptions require substitution of semantically inessential elements for trivialized textual elements.

- (17) (a) *For he watz [borlych and brod]* (1441a, < *breme*) xxxSxxS
 'for he was strong and thickset'
 (b) *#No3t bot [bounden and] brayden* (1833a, < *arounde*) xxSxxSx
 'nothing that was not trimmed and filigreed'
 (c) *#[Now manerly] to my mete* (474a, < *Neuer þe lece*) xSxxxxSx
 'Now (I can go) properly to my meal'

The emendation in (17a) is by Putter and Stokes. Item (17b) and a few similar instances can be emended with words used for their metrical value

elsewhere.²⁰ In (17c), *manerly* would be consistent with the immediate narrative context, which alludes to Arthur's custom of waiting for a marvel before dining. Arthur can go 'properly' to his meal after seeing such a marvel.

More complex emendations seem necessary for the remaining apparent exceptions.

- (18) (a) #*And perfor(e) [prestly_I yow pray]* (1839a, < *I pray yow*) xxxSxxS
 'and therefore I ask you immediately'
 (b) #*[So hyȝly] ȝe wolde not, [hæpəl]* (1828a, < *not so hyȝly*) xSxxxxxSx
 'You would not (be indebted) so deeply, sir'
 (c) #*And I schulde_at þis [yonge] ȝer* (2244a, < *Nwe ȝere*) xxxxxSxS
 'And I should at this New Year'
 (d) #*And ȝe schal in þis [yonge] ȝer* (2400a, < *Nwe ȝer*) xxxxxSxS
 'And you shall in this New Year'

Acceptable verse patterns are obtained in (18a–b) by addition of a semantically inessential word and a change in word order. Items (18c–d) are emended by replacement of prosaic *Nwe* with *yonge*.²¹

6.8 Summary

During the late Old English period, a large-scale shift of A1 variants to the b-verse made room for new complex variants in the a-verse. By the fourteenth century, most A1 variants normally appeared in the b-verse. The exception was type A1 with a long dip in *anacrusis* and a long medial dip, a complex variant confined to the a-verse in *Beowulf*. To transform this marginal variant into an a-verse norm, *function words* were added where they had always been acceptable but with the higher frequency demanded by language change. This strategy was already operative in the late Old English period, when *anacrusis* had become almost routine and all dips had begun to look alike. After word-foot principles were lost there would be no apparent reason to restrict short initial dips in type A1 b-verses. Long initial dips were extended beyond traditional limits in type A1 a-verses, enhancing contrast with the b-verse, which usually had one or two syllables in initial dips. Some A1 patterns characteristic of the b-verse seem to have occurred sporadically in the a-verse. The *Gawain* poet normally used formulaic techniques to avoid such overlap, however.

Mandatory double alliteration in the Middle English a-verse looks at first glance like a major innovation. In *Beowulf*, however, double alliteration was already at or near 100 percent for the type A1 variants that survived to the fourteenth century. Identifying a traditional basis for mandatory

double alliteration lends additional weight to arguments for emending exceptions.²² Manuscript a-verses with single alliteration can be regularized by formulaic strategies used elsewhere for the same purpose.

Archaic SOV constructions were most often used to satisfy requirements of the Middle English b-verse. In the less strictly regulated a-verse, a much higher frequency of modern word orders shows the strength of the SVO norm. Unlike statistical evidence from prose texts, asymmetries between a-verse and b-verse provide direct evidence about attitudes toward word orders at the time of composition. We can be sure that a strong preference for SVO order was established in the fourteenth century.

*Types B and C*7.1 Origins of Middle English Type C¹

Old English type C, introduced in [section 3.5](#), had a light initial foot followed by a compound foot with the pattern Ssx. The initial dip in this type could be extended with an unlimited number of [extrametrical](#) syllables. The decline of compounding favored the C variant with an S:sx word group, which had been placed most often in the b-verse due to its optimal weight.

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| (1) | (a) <i>in / gēardagum</i> (Beo 1b) | x/Ssx |
| | ‘in days of yore’ | |
| | (b) <i>æfter / bēorþege</i> (Beo 117a) | xx/Ssx |
| | ‘after the beer-drinking’ | |
| | (c) <i>vpon Krystmasse</i> (G 37b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘on Christmas’ | |
| | (d) <i>þone / God sende</i> (Beo 13b) | xx/S:sx |
| | ‘whom God sent’ | |
| | (e) <i>vpon bench sytten</i> (G 351b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘sit on the bench’ | |
| | (f) <i>ǣr hē on / weg hwurfe</i> (Beo 264b) | (x)xx/S:sx |
| | ‘before he turned away’ | |
| | (g) <i>þat may 3e wel trawe</i> (G 70b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘you can well believe that’ | |

Two-word variants like (1a) were unacceptable in SGGK because they lacked the required long dip. Two-word variants like (1b) did survive, however. Item (1c) continues this pattern. The second lift of Middle English type C is notated with a capital *S* in accord with the new metrical constant of two primary lifts and the slash is removed as usual. Common Old English realizations with a word group in the second foot are represented by (1d) and (1f). These patterns are continued in (1e) and (1g). In the Middle English b-verse, where only one long dip is permitted and that dip must not be ultralong, only two type C patterns are permissible: xxSSx and

xxxSSx. Hypermetrical b-verse patterns are identical except for the x position between S positions. If a dative *-e* were expressed in *bench*, which is immediately preceded by a preposition in (1e), the verse would be changed from a type C variant into a hypermetrical variant, xxSxSx.

7.2 Distribution of Type C Variants

Table 7.1 provides statistics for distribution of type C in the b-verse. In the larger corpus, I scan prominent words according to the manuscript spelling when retention and loss of underlying *-e* seem about equally probable.

There are no significant frequency differences between the two corpora. The less common variant with a trisyllabic dip has a frequency of 33 percent in the smaller corpus (41/125) and a frequency of 35 percent in the larger corpus (75/217). Disyllabic dips are also preferred in hypermetrical b-verses (Tables 5.3–4). Dividing the larger corpus rigorously into type C and hypermetrical b-verses would require a major philological effort. For distribution of type C, the corpus of limited ambiguity gives adequate results. The only permissible variation clearly favors a disyllabic long dip over a trisyllabic one.

Most apparent violations of Inoue's law in type C have routine explanations.

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------|
| (2) | (a) <i>Iwysse_I wot neuer</i> (1487b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘Indeed I do not know at all’ | |
| | (b) <i>þat all(e) þe los weldez</i> (1528b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘who have all the fame’ | |
| | (c) <i>sy(pe)n þou watz fyrst borne</i> (2394b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘since you were first born’ | |

The initial dip reduces to three syllables by elision in (2a). In eleven instances like (2b), underlying weak *-e* is unrealized in a constituent with high frequency and low prominence.² Putter and Stokes reduce three additional examples by substitution of a high-frequency variant form, as in (2c).³ Similar remedies are available for the remaining apparent exceptions.⁴

Table 7.1 *Distribution of Type C According to the Length of the Initial Dip (342 instances)*

number of syllables	1	2	3	4	total verses
in the smaller corpus		84	41		125
in the larger corpus		141	75	1	217

7.3 Archaic Word Order in Middle English Type C

Order of Verb and Object

OV order is the rule for Old English type C verses with a lexical noun object and a finite main verb. Item (3a) is typical.

- (3) (a) *Hī / sīð drugon* (Beo 1966b) x/S:sx
 ‘they endured the voyage’
 (b) *þæt ge-/bearh fēore* (Beo 1548b) (x)x/S:sx
 ‘it protected life’
 (c) *to þe haf wroʒt anger* (G 2344b) xxxSSx
 ‘to have caused you harm’

Item (3b) is the only corresponding VO instance in the Old English poem. OV constructions continue to predominate in Middle English type C. SGGK contains no C variants analogous to (3b). Item (3c) is a unique C variant with VO order and an alliterating non-finite verb. As a past participle, *wroʒt* has more prominent phrasal stress than a finite verb and is more appropriate for alliteration when it shares the b-verse with a lexical noun.

Type C can be realized by a variety of archaic OV constructions.

- (4) (a) *þæt e(ue)r lif haden* (52b; cf. 266b) xxSSx
 ‘that ever had life’
 (b) *and he hit quyk askez* (975b) xxxSSx
 ‘and he quickly requests it’
 (c) *þæt I þe hyʒt ones* (2218b) xxxSSx
 ‘that I promised you once’
 (d) *þen any god welde* (1064b; 2111b) xxSSx
 ‘than possess any valuables’
 (e) *what he worch schulde* (238b) xxSSx
 ‘what he would do’
 (f) *þæt may ʒe wel trawe* (70b) xxxSSx
 ‘you can well believe that’

The direct object alliterates in two verses like (4a) and the verb supplies the line-final trochaic word. The verb performs the same function in (4b), where its object pronoun occupies the dip. In (4c), the finite verb alliterates in preference to a high-frequency adverb of lower prominence. OV order occurs with a line-final infinitive in (4d) and a similar verse. The infinitive precedes its finite auxiliary verb in 6 verses like (4e).⁵ Item (4f) has OV order of the object *þæt* and its governing verb *trawe* along with VS order of *may* and the subject pronoun *ʒe*.

Placement of Adpositional Phrases

Old English C variants like (5a) have a prepositional phrase in archaic position before the verb.

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------|
| (5) | (a) <i>on / wang stigon</i> (Beo 225b) | xx/S:sx |
| | ‘disembarked onto land’ | |
| | (b) <i>upon bench sytten</i> (G 351b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘sit on the bench’ | |
| | (c) <i>as I in toun herde</i> (G 31b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘as I heard (it) in town’ | |
| | (d) <i>þer þay bi wod schulden</i> (G 2084b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘where they should (go) through the woods’ | |
| | (e) <i>Ic tō / sē wille</i> (Beo 318b) | xx/S:sx |
| | ‘I will (go) to sea’ | |
| | (f) <i>þat 3e put on me</i> (G 1277b; cf. 2150b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘that you put on me’ | |

This construction is continued in fourteen variants like (5b).⁶ In another four instances like (5c), a subject pronoun is expressed.⁷ A subject pronoun and a prepositional phrase precede a finite auxiliary in (5d), where *go* is unexpressed in an archaic construction. Item (5e) is an Old English type C variant with the same type of construction. It is difficult to employ normal word order in type C for a verb and a prepositional phrase. Type C requires adjacent stresses but an unstressed preposition would normally separate the stressed verb from the following stressed object. The prepositional phrase does follow the verb in a pair of unusual variants like (5f). Here the verb alliterates and the object pronoun is *enclitic* to a stressed preposition. The preposition and enclitic pronoun clearly form a phonological Sx word in such cases because they provide an acceptable trochee for the end of the line. This evidence is weighty because the poet has such strict criteria for line-final trochees (sections 8.2–4).

In Old English variants like (6a), a postposition alliterates and a finite verb occupies the non-alliterating position at line end.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| (6) | (a) <i>þā him / mid scoldon</i> (Beo 41b) | xx/S:sx |
| | ‘which should (go) with him’ | |
| | (b) <i>þat hym by stoden</i> (G 1574b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘that stood by him’ | |
| | (c) <i>*þat by hym stoden</i> | *xSxSx |

This strategy requires placement of the postpositional phrase before the verb and is thus doubly archaic. The postpositional phrase does obvious metrical work in (6b), the only analogous variant in SGGK. With

a prepositional phrase we would have (6c), which lacks the required long dip.

Order of Verb and Subject

SGGK provides five examples of VS order in type C.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|--------|
| (7) | (a) | <i>watz þe douth serued</i> (61b) | xxSSx |
| | | ‘the company was served’ | |
| | (b) | <i>*þe douth watz serued</i> | *xSxSx |
| | (c) | <i>and her(e) ar 3ep mony</i> (284b; cf. 1381b) | xxxSSx |
| | | ‘and many here are brave’ | |
| | (d) | <i>sayd(e) þat gay lady</i> (1208b; cf. 1248b) | xxSSx |
| | | ‘said that fair lady’ | |

VS order places the copula before the subject in (7a). Item (7b), with the alternative order, lacks the required long dip. The translation of (7c) represents *3ep* as a predicate adjective. With an alternative analysis, ‘and here (there) are many brave (people),’ the archaic features would be employment of *brave* as a noun, placement of *brave* after *mony*, and absence of existential *there*. The VS construction in (7d) is still used with verbs of speaking in literary prose.

Order of Noun and Adjective

Archaic NA word order occurs in 12 C variants like (8a).

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---------------------------------|--------|
| (8) | (a) | <i>in his aray clene</i> (163b) | xxxSSx |
| | | ‘in his elegant raiment’ | |
| | (b) | <i>*in his clene_aray</i> | xxSxS |
| | (c) | <i>in þe west iles</i> (7b) | xxSSx |
| | | ‘in the west isles’ | |

With the modern AN order of (8b), these variants would become type B, a type unacceptable in the b-verse, and alliteration would fall on the wrong word.⁸ Modern AN word order occurs in (8c) and in many other instances.

Predicate Adjective Constructions

In C variants like (9a–b), the *Gawain* poet employs an archaic predicate adjective construction with the adjective before the linking verb.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|----------------------------------|-------|
| (9) | (a) | <i>3if hit soth were</i> (2457b) | xxSSx |
| | | ‘if it were true’ | |

- | | |
|---|--------|
| (b) <i>as hit best semed</i> (73b) | xxSSx |
| ‘as it seemed best’ | |
| (c) <i>as hit is soþ knawen</i> (348b) | xxxSSx |
| ‘as it is known (to be) true’ | |
| (d) <i>þat is so goud halden</i> (2270b) | xxxSSx |
| ‘that is held (to be) so good’ | |
| (e) <i>and he watz fayn þenne</i> (2019b) | xxxSSx |
| ‘and he was happy then’ | |
| (f) <i>þat art of lyf noble</i> (675b; cf. 180b, 2364b) | xxxSSx |
| ‘who are noble of life’ | |

Archaic order occurs with the copula in (9a) and with *seem* in (9b). In (9c–d), *to be* is understood and must be expressed in an idiomatic modern translation. AV order is necessary in (9a–d) for proper placement of an alliterating monosyllable and a non-alliterating trochaic verb. VA order is less common. The only example with idiomatic modern syntax is (9e). Here the copula occupies the dip and the final trochee is supplied by semantically inessential *þenne*. The variants like (9f) have modern order of the linking verb and adjective.

Placement of Adverbs

The *Gawain* poet employs archaic adverb-verb order in 12 type C verses. There are eight instances like (10a).⁹

- | | | |
|------|---|--------|
| (10) | (a) <i>þer(e) hit forth roled</i> (428b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘where it rolled forth’ | |
| | (b) <i>þat 3e of speken</i> (1242b; cf. 1617b) | xxSSx |
| | ‘that you speak of’ | |
| | (c) <i>and he hit quyþk askez</i> (975b; cf. 1875b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘and he requests it immediately’ | |

A preposition stands before the verb in a pair of verses like (10b). Corresponding Modern English constructions would have a stranded preposition (*that you speak of*) or “pied piping” (*of which you speak*). The instances like (10c) have an adverb and a direct object before the verb. Archaic syntax in (10a–c) allows for proper placement of an alliterating monosyllable and a trochaic verb.

7.4 Double Alliteration in Type C

There are eight type C verses with more than one alliterating syllable.

- | | | |
|------|--|--------|
| (11) | (a) <i>3e arn not wel waryst</i> (1094b) | xxxSSx |
| | ‘you are not well recovered’ | |

- (b) *com þe kyng nerre* (556b) xxSSx
 ‘came nearer the king’
 (c) *and hay! hay! cryed* (1445b) xxSSx
 ‘and cried, “hey, hey!”’

Item (11a) has alliteration on both lifts. In (11b–c), a constituent in the dip alliterates.¹⁰ High-frequency verbs like *com(e)* have intermediate prominence and can be placed in a dip by Old English poets (section 4.11). Assignment of *com* to a lift in (11b) would violate the two-lift constraint on the Middle English b-verse. In (11c), I assume phrase-final stress on the second instance of *hay!* and subordination of the first instance.

7.5 Apparent Examples of Type C in the Middle English A-Verse

When we turn to the a-verse, we find just nineteen apparent examples of type C.¹¹ These include six instances with single alliteration, a suspiciously high frequency of 32 percent.¹² Among type A1 a-verses, apparent examples with single alliteration have a frequency of about 3 percent.

A change in word order can transform several apparent examples of type C into common a-verse variants of other types.

- (12) (a) *For ho hatz dalt drwry* (2449a) xxxSSx (type C)
 ‘for she has dealt (with) romance’
 (b) *#For ho drwry hatz dalt* xxSxxS (type B)
 (c) *Pat wyth a bryzt blaunner* (573a) xxxSSx (type C)
 ‘that (was trimmed) with a splendid fur’
 (d) *#Pat wyth a blaunner ful bryzt* xxxSxxS (type B)
 (e) *Pat þer schulde no mon meue* (1157a) xxxxxSSx (type C)
 ‘that no man there should move’

Item (12a) looks like a syntactic trivialization. With OV order restored, (12b) has the most common type B pattern. With archaic noun-adjective order and semantically inessential *ful*, (12c) becomes (12d), another common B variant. Similar emendations are available for the remaining instances with normal alliteration and less than four syllables in the dip.¹³ Item (12e) has normal alliteration and an ultralong initial dip that provides contrast with the b-verse. A few similar variants suggest that type C might not have been eliminated entirely from the a-verse.¹⁴ These variants may be analogous to the type A1 variants that are characteristic of the b-verse but appear occasionally in the a-verse (section 6.2).

Trivialization seems likely in three apparent instances of type C.

- (13) (a) #*And of þat [neʒe] N[e]w ʒere* (1062a < *ilk*, cf. 1998a) xxxSxSsx
 ‘and from that approaching New Year’
 (b) #*And I schulde _at þis [ʒong] ʒere* (2244a, < *Nwe ʒere*) xxxxxSSx
 ‘and I should (requite you) at this New Year’
 (c) *In ʒong(e) ʒer[e], for he ʒerned* (492a) xSSxxxxsx
 ‘in (the) New Year, for he desired (to hear heroic tales)’

As emended, (13a) scans as type Da. An emendation staying within type C might be appropriate for (13b). The emendation for (13b) could also be used for 2400a, a very similar verse in which the same problem may arise. Item (13c) illustrates use of *ʒong ʒere* as an alternative to *New ʒere*.

Three manuscript a-verses of type C remain to be considered.

- (14) (a) *Now wyl I [such] of hor seruise* (130a; cf. 239b) xxxSxxSsx (type Da)
 ‘now I will (say no more) such things about their dinner service’
 (b) *And [pravez] of his passage* (544a, < *spekez*) xSxxxSsx (type Da)
 ‘and asks leave to depart’
 (c) *Bertilak de Hautdesert* (2445a)

Item (14a) becomes an acceptable Da variant with insertion of *such*, which acquires special prominence when used in isolation as a noun. Isolated *such* provides alliteration in the cited analogue (verse 239b). In item (14b), the most common Da variant results from substitution of *pravez* for prosaic *spekez*. If item (14c) is authentic, it illustrates the problem caused by proper names not easily adapted to the meter. See section 9.14 for a possible emendation.

7.6 Evolution of Middle English Type B

Old English type B, introduced in section 3.7, includes the patterns x/Sxs, xx/Sxs, x/Sxxs, and xx/Sxxs. The most common B variants in SGGK have two long dips.

- (15) (a) *hine / gearwe geman* (Beo 265b) xx/Sx:xs
 ‘remembers him readily’
 (b) *And he ful radly[ch] vpros* (G 367a) xxxSxxS
 ‘and he rose up very promptly’
 (c) *būton / Fitela mid hine* (Beo 879a) xx/Sx:x:s
 ‘except for Fitela (who was) with him’
 (d) *Among prynces of prys* (G 2398a) xxSxxS
 ‘among princes of excellence’
 (e) *I schal gif hym of my gyft* (G 288a) xxSxxxS
 ‘I shall give to him as my gift’

Like (15a), (15b) realizes the Sxxs sequence as a trochaic word followed by a prefixed monosyllable.¹⁵ This is the characteristic realization of the Sxxs

foot in Old English long type B. Notations for the Middle English examples implement the required changes, removing the foot boundary and replacing the secondary lift with a primary lift. Item (15c) has an unusual realization of the Sxxs **foot** with a preposition rather than a prefix on the second x position. This variant has Middle English descendants like (15d). The initial dip in Old English type B was unrestricted but the foot-internal dip was limited to two metrical syllables. There is no Old English precedent for (15e), a Middle English variant with three metrical syllables in the second dip. The distinct character of the second dip was obscured in the era of *Maldon* but the two-syllable limit was still respected. Variants like (15e) must have arisen after word-foot principles had been lost.

7.7 Shift of Type B to the A-Verse

Compared to Ssx compounds, Sxs compounds had lower frequency and Sxxs compounds were rarer still. By the late Old English period, the decline in compounding as a productive process had begun to obscure the relation between compound word patterns and the corresponding foot patterns, rendering type B more complex and less appropriate to the closing half of the **line** (section 4.9). Between the late Old English period and the era of sggk, type B's drift toward the a-verse continued. A monosyllable would have looked increasingly anomalous at the end of the line, especially in comparison with the many trochaic constituents occupying that position in type A1, type C, and the hypermetrical b-verse. Sx words were still **optimal** in Middle English and their placement in line-final position was promoted by the **principle of closure**. A strong correlation between trochaic words and line-final position would eventually motivate a wholesale shift of type B to the a-verse.

Let us define Middle English type B as a metrical pattern with a dip before each of two lifts and the second lift in verse-final position. The notational equivalent of this definition is (x)xS(x)xS. The verse-final stress of type B provides significant contrast with the final trochee of b-verse patterns. Such contrasts enhance the frequency of an a-verse pattern in sggk. Type B has the second-highest frequency in the a-verse, with 367 instances. *Beowulf* has 291 a-verses of type B, fewer instances in a larger sample.

7.8 Traces of Archaic **Foot** Structure in Middle English Type B

Sxxs word groups in Old English long type B tend to mimic the structure of an Sxxs compound (section 3.7). In the variant represented

by (15a), for example, the word group *gearwe geman* resembles the compound *sibbe-gedriht*. Both have a trochaic initial constituent followed by a prefixed monosyllable. In *Beowulf*, type B variants like (15a) account for fifty-two of the sixty-two a-verse instances that realize the SxxS foot as a word group. The word-foot system had been abandoned by the fourteenth century but some Old English constraints on word placement survived. In type B, the *Gawain* poet always places a prefixed monosyllable in the normal Old English location at the end of the verse.

- | | | |
|------|---|----------|
| (16) | (a) <i>To quat kyth he becom</i> (460a) | xxSxxS |
| | ‘to what land he had come’ | |
| | (b) <i>And hatz þe penaunce_apert</i> (2392a) | xxxSxxS |
| | ‘and (you) have the conspicuous penance’ | |
| | (c) <i>Wel bycommes such craft</i> (471a) | xxSxxS |
| | ‘such a pastime suits well’ | |
| | (d) <i>Ouerwalt wyth a word(e)</i> (314a; cf. 770a) | xxSxxS |
| | ‘overturned with a word’ | |
| | (e) <i>O(pe)r sum segg[e]_hym biso3t</i> (96a) | xxSxxS |
| | ‘or some man asked him’ | |
| | (f) <i>And cum to þat merk at mydmorn</i> (1073a) | xxxxSxxS |
| | ‘and come to that meeting-place at mid-morn’ | |

There are twenty type B verses like (16a) but none with a prefixed monosyllable alliterating on the first lift.¹⁶ In type B verses containing borrowed xS words, the xS word always appears verse-finally, as in (16b).¹⁷ These distributions cannot be due to grammatical constraints. Grammatically similar prefixed words with an xSx pattern alliterate on the first lift of thirteen type B verses like item (16c).¹⁸ In the verses like (16d), an xxS word with a disyllabic prefix occupies the first lift. The reducible prefix *ouer-* clearly scans as disyllabic in (16d). Scansion as a monosyllable would yield a type B pattern with much lower frequency. Although a line-final xS word is not required in Middle English type B, line-final position seems to be mandatory for any xS word employed in this type.¹⁹ Such redefined constraints on word placement show how persistently formulaic poets worked to maintain discernible features of poetic tradition. Items (16e–f), the only B variants with alliteration in the dip, also have xS words in final position.²⁰ The underlined constituents *sum* and *myd* have high frequency and low prominence, like other constituents that occupy the dip. Variants like (16e–f) offer insufficient material for further discussion and I simply include them in the counts for ordinary type B.

7.9 The Rise of Double Alliteration in Middle English Type B

Among Old English long B variants like (15a), 27 percent have double alliteration in the a-verse (14/52). The frequency rises to 50 percent for the otherwise similar variants in which an Sxxs word group conforms less closely to the structure of a compound (5/10). Here as in other cases the poet takes special pains to demarcate the end of an unusual dip with an alliterating syllable. The frequency of such unusual dipo had already increased in late Old English poetry (section 4.9). Mandatory double alliteration in Middle English type B can be attributed in part to the structure of the variants that survived. Double alliteration was also promoted by evolution of the second lift. When word-foot structure was lost, there was no perceptible reason to distinguish the second lift of type B from the second lift of type A1. Reanalyzed as an S position, the second lift became a more appropriate site for a second alliterating syllable. As traditional tendencies evolved into new rules, single alliteration in type B would have seemed increasingly anomalous.

7.10 Distribution of Type B Variants in SGGK

Table 7.2 shows the number of syllables in each dip for B variants in the corpus of limited ambiguity.

The two most common dip structures are 2/2 and 3/2. These have common Old English precedents. The structure of next highest frequency is 2/3, which exceeds the Old English limit of two metrical syllables for the second dip in type B. If underlying final -e was present in the stressed word at the end of the verse, a manuscript example of type B would scan as type A1. I scan according to the manuscript in difficult cases as before.

Table 7.2 *Distribution of B Variants in the Smaller Corpus (129 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4
initial ↓				
1		5	5	5
2		41	23	1
3	1	37	8	1
4			1	
5	1			

Table 7.3 *Distribution of B Variants in the Larger Corpus (367 instances)*

medial →	1	2	3	4	5	6
initial ↓						
1		6	9	24	4	1
2	2	115	54	4		
3	7	101	20	4		
4	1	8	2	2		
5		2				
6		1				

The variant with one syllable in the medial dip, which predominates in *Beowulf*, has undergone a sharp decline in frequency. For variants with a short initial dip, the number of syllables in the medial dip peaks at four, providing contrast with the b-verse. For all other variants, the number of syllables in the medial dip peaks at two. The peak variants with a long initial dip have good precedents in Old English type B, which allows any number of syllables in the initial dip. The Middle English variant of highest frequency has two **long dips** of two syllables each. It continues the most common realization of Old English long type B (section 3.7).

7.11 Archaic Word Order in Middle English Type B

Order of Verb and Object

A few type B verses in SGGK place a direct object before a finite main verb.

- (17) (a) *O(pe)r sum segg[e]_hym biso3t* (96a) xxSxxS
 ‘or some knight asked him’
 (b) *Bus hym frayned þat fre* (1549a; cf. 1172a) xxxSxxS
 ‘Thus that noble (lady) questioned him’
 (c) *If I hit lakked o(pe)r set at ly3t* (1250a) xxxSxxxxS
 ‘If I faulted it or belittled (it)’
 (d) *And if þou rede3 hym ry3t* (373a) xxxSxxS
 ‘and if you manage him properly’
 (e) *Her(e) is no mon me to mach* (282a; cf. 1864a, 2437a) xxxSxxS
 ‘There is no man here to match me here’
 (f) *Pat þou schal byden þe bur* (374a) xxxSxxS
 ‘that you will withstand the blow’

The variants like (17a) use OV order to remove a monosyllabic pronoun from final position.²¹ Here OV order also shifts an xS word to final position, the obligatory position for such words in type B. In (17b), OV order moves a pronoun to the first dip, making it long and enhancing contrast with the b-verse. In the very long (17c), OV order brings the second dip a little closer to the two-syllable target. OV syntax stands out as deliberate because finite verbs precede object pronouns in many type B variants, as in (17d), where VO order hits the target for the second dip. The variants like (17e) have infinitive verbs. In these variants, as in (17a), OV syntax removes the monosyllabic pronoun from final position. The OV constructions used to manage pronouns are not used with **lexical nouns**. All B variants like (17f) have modern VO syntax.²² These are distinctively Middle English realizations. There are no comparable B variants in *Beowulf*.

Placement of Adpositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase takes its archaic position before the finite verb in Old English type B verses like (18a).

- (18) (a) *on / flēam gewand* (Beo 1001b) x/S:xS
 ‘turned in flight’
 (b) *And wyth quettyng awharf* (G 2220a) xxSxxS
 ‘and turned back to sharpening (his axe)’
 (c) *Wyth þe pentangel depaynt* (G 620a; cf. 1986a) xxSxxxS
 ‘painted with the pentangle’

The variant in (18a) is continued in variants like (18b), with characteristic extension of the dips to achieve the most common type B pattern. With modern word order, this a-verse would scan as xxSxSx, the most common pattern for hypermetrical b-verses. A prepositional phrase stands before a verb participle in the variants like (18c).

The *Gawain* poet uses archaic syntax primarily in the b-verse. Given the restriction of type B to the a-verse, we would expect few instances with a postpositional phrase. There is in fact a single example.

- (19) *And sy(þe)n waked me wyth* (1094a) xxSxxS
 ‘and then stayed awake with me’

Here archaic syntax removes a monosyllabic pronoun from the end of the verse. Since **postpositions** bear stress, *with* can provide the mandatory second **alliteration**.²³

Order of Verb and Subject

VS constructions are rhetorical rather than archaic and do not default to SV order in the a-verse, as numerous examples in type A1 clearly show (section 6.4).

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|-----------|
| (20) | (a) | <i>For 3e haftrauayled, 'quop þe tulk</i> (1093a) | xxxSxxxxS |
| | | “for you have travelled,” said the man’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Pen(ne) watz he went, er he wýst</i> (1712a) | xxxSxxS |
| | | ‘then he had come, before he realized’ | |
| | (c) | <i>Þat vmb(e)te3e mony tre</i> (770a) | xxSxxxxS |
| | | ‘that many a tree surrounded’ | |
| | (d) | <i>Pen(ne) þay bo3ed to a borde</i> (481a) | xxSxxxxSx |
| | | ‘then they went to a table’ | |

The second clause in (20a) has VS order and alliteration on *tulk*, the subject of a verb of speaking. Synonyms for ‘person’ alliterate with the last word of the quoted speech in other B variants as well.²⁴ A noun or pronoun subject follows the finite verb in sixteen type B variants like (20b).²⁵ Most of these have a clause-initial adverb, but there are exceptions like (20c). I see no obvious metrical reason for VS order in (20b). Here the choice of syntax affects only the order of dip-internal words and inversion seems to show a non-metrical preference for VS order after an adverb. This order still occurs in constructions like *Then came the main course* and *Never have I seen such a thing*, though the latter may now seem old-fashioned. Though preferred, VS order is not mandatory after an adverb. Item (20d) employs SV order to obtain a type A1 pattern of higher frequency.

Order of Noun and Adjective

Archaic NA constructions appear primarily in the b-verse but are sometimes useful in the a-verse (section 6.4). Type B variants like (21a–b) employ NA constructions with semantically inessential *ful*.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|----------|
| (21) | (a) | <i>Whene Guenore, ful gay</i> (74a; cf. 152a) | xxSxxxxS |
| | | ‘Queen Guinevere, very fair’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Wyth mony baner ful bry3t</i> (117a; cf. 14a, 1119a) | xxxSxxS |
| | | ‘with many a most splendid banner’ | |
| | (c) | <i>?Wyth mony ful bry3t baner</i> | xxxxSSx |

Employment of *ful* in (21a) provides a long dip even if weak *e* is unrealized in the French name *Guenore*. Semantically inessential *mony* provides a second long dip in the variants like (21b). If type C were desirable in the a-verse, the filler words *mony* and *ful* could be used to create variants like (21c). This constructed example is adapted to the opening half of the line, with normal

word order and an ultralong dip providing contrast with the b-verse. Formulaic devices are not used to create a-verses like (21c), however.

Predicate Adjective Constructions

An adjective appears before a linking verb in a single type B verse.

- (22) (a) *And more he is þen any mon* (2100a) xSxxxxxS
 ‘and he is larger than any man’
 (b) *?And he is more þen any mon* xxxSxxxxS

The medial dip is unusually long in (22a), which has a pattern attested only four times. Normal word order would yield (22b), but with no apparent improvement, since the resulting pattern also has just four occurrences (Table 7.3). If (22a) is authentic, its word order was chosen for rhetorical emphasis rather than for metrical reasons.

Order of Verb and Adverb

An adverb precedes a finite verb in five type B verses.

- (23) (a) *#And he ful rad[lych] vpros* (367a; cf. 757a) xxxSxxS
 ‘and he rose up very quickly’
 (b) *Al studied þat þer stod* (237a) xSxxxxS
 ‘All who stood there watched intently’

With substitution of *-lych* for *-ly* to prevent elision, the verses like (23a) hit the target of two syllables for the second dip. Placement of *þer* before the verb in (23b) creates a type B variant with an ultralong medial dip.²⁶

7.12 Anomalous Type B Verses with Single Alliteration

In Middle English type B, as in type A1, we encounter manuscript a-verses with alliteration on the first lift only. Item (24) illustrates this type of exception.

- (24) (a) *And e(ue)r our(e) luflych[e] [lede]* (1657a, < *knyzt*) xxxSxxSx
 ‘and always our attractive fellow (was beside the lady)’
 (b) *#Wyth a [hizlich] vrysoun* (608a, < *lyztly*, cf. 183a) xxSxSxs
 ‘with a splendid silk band’
 (c) *#Pat quen [þe burn] blusched þerto* (650a, < *he*, cf. 2071a) xxxSSxxs
 ‘so that when the man (= he) looked at it’

Putter and Stokes replace *knyzt* with *lede* in (24a). The verse then scans as a common A1 variant. Similar replacements yield well-attested patterns in

other a-verses.²⁷ The problem in (24b) may be due to simple misreading of *hiȝlich* 'splendid.' Item (24c) assumes trivialization of a formulaic strategy found in *Beowulf* as well as SGGK: use of a lexical noun for its alliterative value under conditions when a pronoun would be used in ordinary speech. The same strategy seems to have been trivialized in other cases.²⁸

In some apparent exceptions, one semantically inessential concept seems to have replaced another, with little or no denotative effect.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (25) | (a) <i>And [prestly], lest he displese yow</i> (1304a, < <i>fire</i>) | xSxxxxSxs |
| | 'and promptly, lest he displease you' | |
| | (b) <i>#Of sum [aunter in erde]</i> (93a, < <i>auenturus þyng</i>) | xxSxxSx |
| | 'of some adventure on earth' | |
| | (c) <i>#And [agayn] at þe gargulun</i> (1340a, < <i>eft</i> , cf. 1981a) | xxSxxSxs |
| | 'and in turn at the throat' | |

In (25a), Putter and Stokes obtain an acceptable Db variant by replacing *fire* 'moreover,' with *prestly* 'promptly.' Item (25b) substitutes *aunter in erde*, a phrase used elsewhere in the poem.²⁹ Replacement of *eft* by synonymous *agayn* yields an acceptable Db verse in (25c).

Omission of a semantically inessential word seems to have occurred in most of the remaining instances with single alliteration.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (26) | (a) <i>Ben much of þe garysoun o(þe)r gold(e) [gat] þat þay hauen</i> (1255) | |
| | 'than much of the treasure or gold that they have got' | |
| | (b) <i>And þer bayen hym [bremely]</i> (1909a) | xxSxxSxs |
| | 'and there (they) bayed (at) him bravely' | |
| | (c) <i>#Þat [wel] watz wounden wyth yrn</i> (215a; cf. 684a) | xSxSxxs |
| | 'that was well bound with iron' | |
| | (d) <i>#Debatande [busyly inwith]</i> (2179a; cf. 68a, 2182a) | xSxxSxxsx |
| | 'deliberating earnestly within' | |

Putter and Stokes add semantically inessential *gat* to the b-verse in (26a), making *gold* available for the second alliteration in the a-verse. The editors provide a second alliteration for (26b) with *bremely*, one of several adverbs that bestow semantically inessential praise on actions by worthy characters (hunting dogs included). Insertion of a semantically inessential adverb also regularizes (26c) and thirteen similar variants.³⁰ The best metrical result for (26d) also requires emendation of *wyth hymself* to *inwith*.

7.13 Apparent Examples of the Pattern (x)xxxxS

The *Gawain* manuscript contains a few apparent examples of the pattern *(x)xxxxS, which has no precedent in *Beowulf*.

- (27) (a) *Now [swype] with þis ilk swyn* (1615a; cf. 2034a) xSxxxxS
 ‘now quickly with this same swine’
 (b) *#Bot of all(e) þat [bigly] her(e) bult* (25a; cf. Pe 963) xxxxSxxS
 ‘but of all that ambitiously built here’

Putter and Stokes add semantically inessential *swype* in (27a) and the result is a type B variant with twenty-four attestations in Table 7.3. Similar emendations for variants like (27b) add a semantically inessential word used for its alliterative value elsewhere.³¹

In some cases an alliterating word seems to have been replaced by a synonym.

- (28) (a) *#If þay had(e) [kaʒt] any karp* (704a, < *herde*), cf. C 1426) xxxSxxS
 ‘if they had caught (heard) any talk’
 (b) *#Forþy, [knizt], þis enquest* (1056a, < *sir*, cf. 400a) xxSxxS
 ‘So, sir, (I ask you) this question’
 (c) *#[N]if I [debonaire]_had ben(e)* (2343a, < *deliuer*, cf. 1273a) xxxSxxS
 ‘If I had not been courteous’
 (d) *#3e may [behold] bi þis braunch* (265a, < *be seker*, cf. 776b) xxSxxxS
 ‘You can see by this branch’

With the alliteration in (28c) compare *debonerte*, which can alliterate on *-bon-* (Pa 418a, G 1273a).

The remaining apparent examples of (x)xxxS seem to require more complex emendations.

- (29) (a) *And quer(e)-so-euer þys mon* (644a)
 ‘and wherever this man (was present)’
 (b) *#And quer(e)-so [on molde] þys mon* (cf. 914a) xxxxSxxS
 (c) *Neuer syn þat he watz burn(e)* (2320a)
 ‘never since he was a man’
 (d) *#Ne(ue)r syn þat [burn watz on barme]* (cf. Pa 510a) xxxSxxSx
 (e) *Bot on I wolde yow pray* (2439a)
 ‘but one (thing) I would ask you’
 (f) *#Bot on [prest I yow] pray* (cf. Pa 303a) xxSxxS

These emendations delete some semantically inessential words while adding others (*on molde* ‘on earth,’ *on barme* ‘at the breast,’ *prest* ‘earnestly’).

7.14 Summary

There are parallels between evolution of type A1 and evolution of types B and C, considered together. An Old English A1 pattern with two long dips, excluded from the b-verse in *Beowulf*, evolved into the norm for the Middle English a-verse. Simpler type A1 variants, already shifting to the

b-verse in *Maldon*, evolved into favored patterns of the Middle English b-verse. Type B, already shifting to the a-verse in *Maldon*, was excluded from the b-verse in SGGK. Type C variants that had always favored the b-verse were shifted out of the a-verse, with a handful of possible exceptions. Restricted placement of types B and C enhanced metrical asymmetry with little added effort, clarifying the structure of the Middle English *line*.

We have now considered the three Middle English types permissible in the closing half of the *line*: type A₁, type C, and the hypermetrical b-verse. All Middle English variants of these types had stress patterns acceptable in *Beowulf*. Type C had two lifts and one dip. The other b-verse types had two lifts and two dips. In type B and the type A₁ a-verse, which also had two lifts and two dips, contrast with the b-verse was enhanced by extension of dips, sometimes beyond Old English limits. Such departures from traditional norms were restricted to the a-verse by the *principle of closure*.

Survival and Extinction in Types A2, Da, and E

8.1 Origins of Middle English Type A2¹

Old English type A2 includes the subtypes Sx/Ss, Ss/Sx, and Ss/Ss (sections 3.10 and 3.11). Sx/Ss (type A2b) is the only subtype that survives in SGGK. Old English variants of this subtype are normally a-verses with alliteration on both primary lifts.

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| (1) | (a) <i>fēondes / fōtlāst</i> (Beo 2289a)
‘the fiend’s footprint’ | Sx/Ss |
| | (b) <i>ðicgean / (ofer) þā niht</i> (Beo 736a)
‘to feast after <i>that</i> night’ | Sx/(xx)S:s |
| | (c) <i>(Ge)wāt þā / (ofer) wægholm</i> (Beo 217a)
‘went then over sea-waves’ | (x)S:x/(xx)Ss |

The two-word expression of Sx/Ss, represented by (1a), lacked a long dip and would not be acceptable in SGGK. This A2 subtype had always allowed considerable flexibility, however. Its second foot could be filled by an S:s word group, as in (1b). Its medial dip could be extended, as in (1b–c). Anacrusis was permissible and the first foot could be filled by an S:x word group. Item (1c) illustrates both possibilities.

Since A2b is the only A2 variant that survives in SGGK, I will refer to its descendants simply as Middle English type A2, notated with the usual changes as (x)Sx(x)Ss. This pattern has 189 attestations in SGGK, as compared with 101 attestations in the longer *Beowulf*. The secondary lift survives in Middle English type A2 and is notated as before with a lower-case *s*.

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------|
| (2) | (a) <i>Hit is god, quop þe godmon</i> (1392a)
“‘It is good,’” said the master of the house’ | xxSxxSs |
| | (b) <i>Schawed wyth a scharp knyf</i> (1331a)
‘scraped with a sharp knife’ | SxxxSs |
| | (c) <i>Bald(e)ly þay blw prys</i> (1362a)
‘vigorously they blew the capture signal’ | SxxSs |
| | (d) <i>truly I pray yow</i> (1785b)
‘truly I pray you’ | SxxSx (type A1) |

Item (2a) realizes the Ss sequence as the compound *godmon*. In other instances like (2b), the Ss sequence is realized as a noun-adjective word group. Four of these word groups consist of *mon* and a semantically inessential adjective that provides alliteration: *god mon* (1179a), *derf mon* (1492a), *fre mon* (1961a), and *pro mon* (2300a). Tolkien and Gordon print *godmon* in item (2a) but *god mon* in 1179a. Some Middle English compounds are much like noun-adjective word groups and identifying them as compounds can be difficult. Old English editors face a similar problem in determining whether a word group like *brad swurd* ‘broad sword’ might in fact be a compound.² The other adjective-noun word groups are *mayn hors* ‘great horse’ (187a) and *god day* ‘good day’ (1290a, 2073a). Some word groups in SGGK have no parallels in *Beowulf*. A verb-adverb construction realizes the Ss foot in *start forth* ‘started forth’ (431a), *razt out* ‘reached out’ (432a), and *brozt forth* ‘brought forth’ (1409a). There is an adverb-adjective construction (*ful dep* ‘very deep,’ 741a), and an archaic construction with an infinitive before its auxiliary (*negh myzt* ‘might approach,’ 1054a). The other distinctively Middle English word groups have verbs in construction with subjects, objects, or stranded prepositions: *stod on* ‘stood on’ (170a), *play wyth* ‘play with’ (262a), *he watz* ‘he was’ (592a), and *blw prys* in item (2c). Such Ss word groups are carefully distinguished from S:x groups like *pray yow* in (2d), where the pronoun is an unstressed enclitic and the verse scans as type A1.

8.2 Subordinate Stress on Secondary Lifts

In a Middle English type A1 a-verse, contrast with the b-verse is provided by a second long dip or an ultralong dip. In Middle English type A2, a third lift provides contrast and contrasting dip structures are less urgently required.

- (3) (a) *And sayde, ‘Wyze, welcum’* (252a; cf. 814a) xxxSxSs
 ‘and said, “Welcome, sir”’
 (b) *Þus þay meled of muchquat* (1280a) xxSxxSs
 ‘thus they spoke of many things’

Item (3a) has the dip structure of a hypermetrical b-verse, but the Ss compound *welcum* marks this variant effectively as an a-verse, contrasting with the strictly trochaic constituent at the end of the line. Though not required, two long dips occur in A2 variants like (3b). As item (4b) shows, ultralong dips are also permissible.

Unlike the *Beowulf* poet, the *Gawain* poet never allows interpretation of a verse-final compound as Sx, not even when the wordlike character of the secondary constituent seems to be obscured.

- (4) (a) *Pat **s**penet on his **s**parlyr* (158a) xSxxxSs
 'that attached on his calf'
 (b) *Penn **s**teppez he into **s**tirop* (2060a) xSxxxxSs
 'Then he steps into stirrup'
 (c) *And þurȝ wyles of wymmen* (2415a) xxSxxSs
 'and through wiles of women'

The verse-final words in (4a–c) are descended from Old English compounds: *sparlyr* from *spar-lira* 'calf muscle,' *stirop* from *stīg-rāp* 'mounting rope,' and *wymmen* from *wif-men* 'female humans.' Such etymological compounds still scan as Ss and never appear at the end of the b-verse.³

Certain Old English suffixes bore a stress comparable to secondary stress in compounds.⁴ Scansion as Ss is the norm for forms like *wald-end* 'ruler,' *sorh-full* 'sorrowful,' *eoten-isc* 'entish, gigantic,' *sorh-lēas* 'sorrowless,' *bet-līc* 'goodly,' *fēa-sceaft* 'ill-fated,' and *long-sum* 'longsome, tedious.' Disyllables with stressed suffixes are excluded from the end of the line in *Beowulf*. They are more strictly regulated than compound names like *Hrōþgār*, which normally scan as Ss but occasionally as Sx. Old English *-līc*, ancestor of our modern *-ly* suffix, appears twelve times at the end of the a-verse but never at the end of the b-verse.⁵

The descendants of stressed suffixes still bear metrical stress in Middle English alliterative poetry. SGGK provides many instances of stressed usage with the suffix *-ly* and its variant *-lych*, both from Old English *-līc*. Disyllables like *godly* / *godlych* 'goodly' appear 37 times at the end of an a-verse but never at the end of a b-verse.⁶ In the type A2 variants (5a–e), the Middle English suffixes *-ful*, *-lez*, *-nes*, *-chip*, and *-yng* have metrical stress.

- (5) (a) *And **m**ony oþer **m**enskeful* (555a) xSxxxSs
 'and many other worthies'
 (b) *Armed, ful **a**3lez* (2335a) SxxSs
 'armed, totally fearless'
 (c) *He watz so **j**oly of his **j**oyfnes* (86a) xxxSxxxSs
 'he was so jolly in his youth'
 (d) *Your word(e) and your worchip* (1521a) xSxxSs
 'your fame and your worship'
 (e) *Arayed for þe rydyng* (1134a) xSxxxSs
 'dressed for riding'

These stressed suffixes appear at the end of twenty-one a-verses but never at the end of a b-verse.⁷

8.3 Suffixes Without Metrical Stress

Not all suffixes have the metrical **prominence** associated with an **s position**. Scansion as Sx is required for the verse-final words in (6a–d).

- (6) (a) *mægenes* / *strengest* (Beo 196b) Sx/Sx (type A1)
 ‘strongest in might’
 (b) *and fare at þe gaynest* (G 1973b) xSxxxSx (type A1)
 ‘and travel by the most direct (route)’
 (c) *nūða* / *cræftig* (Beo 1962b) Sx/Sx (type A1)
 ‘skilled in malicious acts’
 (d) *so Rel[y]n(i)arde watz wylé* (G 1728b) xSxxxSx (type A1)
 ‘so wily was Reynard’

The Old English superlative suffix had lower prominence than derivative suffixes and the *Beowulf* poet used *-est* routinely at line end, as in (6a). The Middle English descendant of *-est* also had the metrical value Sx, as indicated by line-final placement in (6b). Old English suffixal *-ig*, the ancestor of our *-y* in words like *crafty*, had relatively low prominence in Old English and appears at the end of b-verses like (6c). The Middle English descendant of *-ig*, spelled *-y* or *-é*, can also appear at the end of the b-verse, as in (6d).

Middle English *nowþe* ‘now, now then’ is descended from Old English *nūþa*, compounded from *nū* ‘now’ and *þā* ‘then.’ This word already scans as trochaic in *Beowulf*, as shown by type C variants like (7a).

- (7) (a) *Ic / þē nūða* (Beo 426b) x/S:sx (type C)
 ‘now then, I (will ask) you’
 (b) *þat leuer wer nowþe* (G 1251b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 ‘who would now prefer’

The *Beowulf* poet never places an unambiguous Ss compound on the last two metrical positions of type C. Old English *nūða* scans unambiguously as trochaic in (7a). In SGGK, *nowþe* can provide trochaic closure for the line, as in (7b).⁸ Semantically inessential *nowþe* does important metrical work in (7b), creating an optimal b-verse from a phrase too short to qualify as a verse of any kind.

8.4 Scansion of Anglicized Borrowings

When Latin words with non-initial stress were borrowed into Old English, primary stress was placed on the first syllable and the syllable with primary stress in Latin was reduced to secondary stress.⁹ Such anglicized forms **alliterate** on the first syllable in Old English poetry. The *Gawain* poet’s

French borrowings were anglicized in the same way, with primary stress and **alliteration** on the initial syllable and secondary stress on the most prominent syllable of the French pronunciation. The proper name *Gawain* rhymes with *frayn* in 487, *faȳn* in 838, *payn* in 1044, *gayn* in 1619, *slayn* in 1948, and *bayn* in 2156. *Gawain* clearly has its French iambic value in these rhymed lines. In twenty-three type A2 verses, on the other hand, *Gawain* and its variant *Wawain* scan as Ss, with alliteration on the first syllable and subordinate metrical stress on the second syllable.¹⁰ The first syllable of *Gawain*/*Wawain* alliterates on the first lift of thirteen b-verses.¹¹ This high-frequency name never appears on the second lift of a b-verse, however. *Gawain*/*Wawain* cannot be employed as a line-final trochee.

In a few a-verses like (8a), a prefixed French word with a monosyllabic root scans as xS in final position, with **alliteration** on the root. Old English prefixed monosyllables furnished precedents for **root** alliteration in these borrowings.¹² Usually, however, disyllables of French origin that originally had iambic stress take on their anglicized value Ss at the end of the a-verse, with **alliteration** on the first syllable.¹³ Such words rarely appear at the end of the b-verse. Items (8b–d) are the only apparent exceptions.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| (8) | (a) <i>Si(pe)n þe sege_and þe assaut</i> (1a; cf. 620a, 1006b)
'after the siege and the assault' | xxSxxxS |
| | (b) <i>þat prynce to honóur[e]</i> (830b; cf. 1168b, 1273b, 2145b)
'to honor that prince' | xSxxxSx |
| | (c) <i>leuez his corsour</i> (1583b)
'leaves his horse' | SxxxSx |
| | (d) <i>hit wer(e) littel daynté</i> (1250b)
'it would hardly be pleasant' | ?xxSxSx |

I exclude two instances with line-final *chapel*, which scans as Sx in 705b and 1583b. As an important religious borrowing, *chapel* had high frequency and its second syllable probably lost stress early. The remaining exceptions form a small, suspicious group that becomes even smaller after routine editorial improvements. In the variants like (8b), insertion of final *-e* by Putter and Stokes yields unremarkable b-verse patterns with French stress placement. If (8c–d) are authentic, they should probably be interpreted as evidence for early loss of final stress in anglicized *corsour* and *daynté*. Given the extreme rarity of apparent examples, I assume without further argument that Middle English type A2 was restricted to the a-verse. This enhancement of asymmetry required little added effort because unambiguous instances of the Sx/Ss pattern had always been excluded from the b-verse (section 3.11).

8.5 Extinction of Types A2a and A2ab

In Old English A2a variants like (9a–b), where the verse-final word has a short stressed syllable, the verse-initial word has weak secondary stress but scans unambiguously as Ss.¹⁴

- (9) (a) *rīdend / swefað* (Beo 2457b) Ss/Sx (type A2a)
 ‘the rider sleeps’
 (b) *Bēowulf / fetod* (Beo 1310b) Ss/Sx (type A2a)
 ‘Beowulf (was) fetched’
 (c) *gūðrinc / monig* (Beo 838b) Ss/Sx (type A2a)
 ‘many a battle-warrior’

Items (9a–b) have the same A2a pattern as (9c), which has an Ss poetic compound in the first foot. Although the compound proper name *Bēowulf* scans unambiguously as Sx in some verses, scansion as Ss is required in (9b). As we have observed (sections 3.9–10), verse-initial placement of a compound foot contravenes Behaghel’s law and imposes compensatory restrictions. Anacrusis is forbidden in type A2a. There is no medial dip in the basic A2a pattern and the poet seldom creates one with an extrametrical syllable. From a Middle English perspective, type A2a has too many stresses for a b-verse and is too intolerant of long dips for an a-verse. This type had become extinct by the fourteenth century. Type A2ab, the other Old English A2 subtype with a heavy first foot, has the pattern Ss/Ss. As an extreme departure from the two-stress norm, type A2ab was marginal even in *Beowulf* (section 3.11). It had the same evolutionary weaknesses as type A2a and shared its fate. In Middle English alliterative poetry, apparent examples of type A2a should be scanned as type A1 and apparent examples of type A2ab should be scanned as Middle English type A2 (Sx/Ss, the descendant of Old English type A2b).

In Old English poetry, forms like *Bēowulf* and *rīdend*, which scan unambiguously as Ss in (9a–b), can also appear at the end of the line, like unambiguous Sx words. Such varying metrical value does not occur in SGGK. Ss words always scan as Ss in verse-final position and can never appear at the end of the line. In non-final position, however, Ss words always scan as Sx, with neutralization of their subordinate stress.

- (10) (a) *of red golde werkez* (1817b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 ‘of red gold workmanship’
 (b) *Den(ne) watz Gawan ful glad* (1079a) xxSxxS (type B)
 ‘then Gawain was very glad’
 (c) *and gaynly he sayde* (476b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 ‘and fitly he said’

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| (d) <i>þer baret is rered</i> (353b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| ‘where strife is raised’ | |
| (e) <i>in sesoun of wynter</i> (1382b) | xSxxSx (type A1) |
| ‘in (the) season of winter’ | |

Neutralization is an important feature of the new rules for the a-verse, which allow constituents with subordinate linguistic stress to occupy non-final x positions, as for example in (10a), which alliterates on *r*- and scans as xSxxSx.¹⁵ If *golde* bore metrical stress, this example would lack the required long dip and would violate the two-lift limit for the b-verse. Although it is a lexical adjective, *golde* undergoes linguistic subordination between prominent words by the Rhythm Rule and can plausibly be assigned to a dip.¹⁶ If *golde* is metrically unstressed in (10a), we can hardly posit metrical stress on the second syllable of words like *Gawan* in (10b) or *gaynly* in (10c). These verses scan as type A1. Items (10d–e) illustrate neutralization of subordinate stress in anglicized common nouns of French origin. With stress neutralized in the dip, items (10a–e) all have acceptable patterns. Stress neutralization is a further reduction of *prominence* in constituents with intermediate phrasal stress that occurs when they are placed in a dip. This is the same kind of reduction that inhibits expression of weak *e* in the dip (section 5.3). The origins of stress neutralization can be found in *Beowulf*.¹⁷

8.6 Extinction of Type E

The other Old English verse type with a medial *s position* is type E (Ssx/S), introduced in section 3.9. Item (11a) is typical.

- | | | |
|------|--|-------------------|
| (11) | (a) <i>fȳrbendum / fæst</i> (Beo 722a) | Ssx/S |
| | ‘secure with forged bars’ | |
| | (b) <i>word oþer / fand</i> (Beo 870b) | S:sx/S |
| | ‘found other words’ | |
| | (c) <i>#Warloker to haf [wæret]</i> (G 677a, < <i>wro3t</i> , cf. 2344a) | SxxxxSx (type A1) |
| | ‘to have worked more warily’ | |
| | (d) <i>#Goud moroun, gay [lady]</i> (G 1213a; cf. 1208b) | SxxSsx (type Da) |
| | ‘good morning, fair lady’ | |
| | (e) <i>#Whyrlande_out [wy3thy]_of a wro</i> (2222a; cf. 688) | SxxSxxs (type Db) |
| | ‘whirling out swiftly from a nook’ | |

Old English variants like (11b) realize the Ssx foot as a word group, adding further complexity to an inherently complex pattern. Such variants had low frequency throughout the Old English period. Like type A2, type E rules out the initial dip that occurs so often in the Middle English a-verse. As a Middle English b-verse pattern, type E is unacceptable because it has three lifts and employs a verse-final S word. Survivals of type E in the Middle

English a-verse would be expected to exhibit the defining characteristics of this type: a native Ssx word or word group at the beginning of the verse and a stressed monosyllable at the end, with alliteration on the first and last syllables. Items (i1c–e) are the only verses with these characteristics. All of them can be regularized by traditional formulaic techniques. Item (i1c) might have arisen from substitution of ordinary *wrozt* for poetic *waret*. In (i1d–e), semantically inessential words might simply have been omitted. I assume without further argument that type E had gone extinct.

Words that scan as Ssx at the end of the verse scan as Sxx in non-final position.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|----------|
| (12) | (a) | <i>and holtwodez vnder</i> (742b) | xSxxSx |
| | | ‘and woodlands below’ | |
| | (b) | <i>holsumly slepes</i> (1731b) | SxxSx |
| | | ‘and sleeps healthfully’ | |
| | (c) | <i>and patrounes bicom</i> (6b) | xSxxxSx |
| | | ‘and became lords’ | |
| | (d) | <i>of Gawaynez giftez</i> (1807b) | xSxxSx |
| | | ‘of Gawain’s gifts’ | |
| | (e) | <i>And þe grehoundez so grete</i> (1171a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | | ‘and the greyhounds so great’ | |
| | (f) | <i>When þe donkande dewe</i> (519a) | xxSxxSx |
| | | ‘when the dampening dew’ | |
| | (g) | <i>Of þe largesse and þe lenþe</i> (1627a) | xxSxxxSx |
| | | ‘of the hugeness and the length’ | |

With their trisyllabic words interpreted as Sxx, (i2a–d) have common b-verse patterns. If these words had two metrical stresses, (i2a–d) would be unacceptable, since a b-verse must have two and only two metrical stresses. Items (i2e–g) scan normally as type A1 with neutralization of the first subordinate stress. An alternative scansion for these verses, (x)Ssx(x)Sx, would have no precedent in *Beowulf*, since Ssx/Sx is not an Old English verse type (section 3.3).

8.7 Distribution of A2 Variants in sggk

With principles of scansion defined for Middle English type A2, we proceed to the tables of distribution.

Type A2 contrasts markedly with type A1 in its distribution of variants with limited ambiguity (compare Table 6.1). The dip structures with highest frequency in the type A1 a-verse are unacceptable in any b-verse type. Most A2 variants, on the other hand, have dip structures that are common in the b-verse. A2 variants with a long medial dip usually have a short initial dip or no initial dip, as with type A1 b-verses. A2 variants with

Table 8.1 *Distribution of A2 Variants in the Smaller Corpus (105 instances)*

medial					
→	1	2	3	4	5
initial					
↓					
0		11	15	1	
1	1	11	18	2	1
2	12	9	2		
3	14	4	4		

Table 8.2 *Distribution of A2 Variants in the Larger Corpus (189 instances)*

medial					
→	1	2	3	4	5
initial					
↓					
0		13	23	3	
1	1	26	35	7	4
2	20	21	5	1	
3	19	7	4		

a long initial dip usually have a short medial dip, as with hypermetrical b-verses.

Relative frequencies for type A2 are similar in [Table 8.2](#).

The two most common variants still have dip structures that are common in type A1 b-verses, though 2/2 is now slightly more common than 2/1 or 3/1, the permissible dip structures for hypermetrical b-verses.

One long dip seems to be mandatory in type A2.¹⁸

- (13)
- (a) *So god as [god] Gawayn* (1297a)
‘as good as worthy Gawain’

Gawan gef hym god day (1029a)
‘Gawain wished him good day’

Gef hym God and goud day (2073a)
‘Commended him to God and (wished him) good day’
- *xSxSs > xSxxSs

SxxxSs

xxSxSs

Item (13a) is an apparent example with two short dips. As emended by Putter and Stokes, it scans as a type A2 variant with a semantically bleached adjective alliterating in the dip. Here *god* is bleached because it is a vague intensifier and also because it is Gawain's predictable epithet.¹⁹ Similar alliteration in the dip occurs in (13b–c). Assignment of *gef* to a lift in these verses would create strange patterns with four lifts. Assignment of *gef* to the dip yields acceptable A2 variants. High-frequency main verbs occupy the dip with increased frequency in late Old English poems. One such verb in *Judith* alliterates in the dip (section 4.11). Absence of a long dip in type A2 would provide asymmetry with the b-verse if all imaginable contrasts had equal status. The contrasts valued by the *Gawain* poet, however, are those that mark the a-verse as longer or heavier than the b-verse. As compared with an arbitrary selection of contrasts, a coherent system based on size and weight would have been easier to acquire by intuition and to apply at the speed of performance.

The *Gawain* poet's preferred realization of the type A1 a-verse, xxSxxSx, has a low-frequency Old English realization as its precedent. Many type A1 a-verses in SGGK have no precedents in *Beowulf*. Middle English type A2 differs in this respect, employing a wider variety of traditional realizations and lengthening dips less often beyond traditional limits. For concreteness, representative Old and Middle English examples are paired in item (14).

- | | | |
|------|--|--------------|
| (14) | (a) <i>wyrmas</i> / (<i>ond</i>) <i>wildēor</i> (Beo 1430a)
'serpents and wild beasts' | Sx/(x)Ss |
| | (b) <i>Fochchez þis fre mon</i> (G 1961a)
'this courtly man takes (his leave)' | SxxSs |
| | (c) <i>Hyrte</i> / (<i>hyne</i>) <i>hordweard</i> (Beo 2593a)
'the hoard-warden roused himself' | Sx/(xx)Ss |
| | (d) <i>Schaued wyth a scharp knyf</i> (G 1331a)
'scraped with a sharp knife' | SxxxSs |
| | (e) (<i>Ge</i>) <i>wāt þā</i> / (<i>ofer</i>) <i>wāġholm</i> (Beo 217a)
'went overseas then' | (x)Sx/(xx)Ss |
| | (f) <i>For wele ne for worchyp</i> (G 2432a)
'(neither) for wealth nor for fame' | xSxxxSs |

Type A1 employed non-traditional dip structures in the a-verse for effective contrast with the b-verse. When other kinds of contrast were available, as in type A2, the *Gawain* poet conformed more closely to traditional dip structures.

8.8 Archaic Word Order in Middle English Type A2

Type A2 appears only in the a-verse, where metrical alternatives are less urgently required. As expected, archaic syntax has restricted frequency in this type.

Order of Verb and Object

Archaic SOV order occurs in four verses, all with pronoun subjects and objects.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (15) | (a) <i>Pat þou me telle truly</i> (380a) | xxxSxSs |
| | ‘that you tell me truly’ | |
| | (b) <i>Ȝif I þe telle truly</i> (406a) | xxxSxSs |
| | ‘if I tell you truly’ | |
| | (c) <i>And he hym þonkked þroly</i> (939a) | xxxSxSs |
| | ‘and he thanked him heartily’ | |
| | (d) <i>*And he þonkked [him] þroly</i> | xxSxxSs |
| | (e) <i>I wolde your(e) wylnyng</i> (1546a; cf. 1611a, 2241a) | xSxxSs |
| | ‘I would (like to do) your will’ | |
| | (f) <i>Kest vp þe cortyn</i> (1192a) | SxxSs |
| | ‘cast up the curtain’ | |
| | (g) <i>I nolde bot if I hit negh myȝt</i> (1054a) | xSxxxxxSs |
| | ‘I would not willingly fail to reach it’ | |

A second long dip could be obtained with modern word order in (15a–c), as in (15d). The relevant examples are few in number but they suggest that the poet employed archaic syntax to avoid A2 variants with two long dips. A few otherwise similar verses with lexical noun objects have VO order, like (15e), an instance of the most common A2 pattern. VO order is the rule for nine A2 verses with a lexical noun object and no expressed subject, e.g. (15f).²⁰ Item (15g) is the only A2 verse with an infinitive placed before its governing auxiliary verb.

VS Order

In type A2, as in other a-verse types, rhetorical VS order has significant frequency.

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (16) | (a) <i>Þen haylsed he ful hendly</i> (829a) | xSxxxSs |
| | ‘then he courteously greeted’ | |
| | (b) <i>*Þen [he] haylsed ful hendly</i> | xxSxxSs |
| | (c) <i>‘Bi Mary,’ quop þe menskeful</i> (1268a) | xSxxxSs |
| | “‘By Mary,” said the noble’ | |
| | (d) <i>‘Ȝe, Peter,’ quop þe porter</i> (813a) | xSxxxSs |
| | “‘Yes, (by Saint) Peter,” said the porter’ | |
| | (e) <i>‘Bot your gordel,’ quop Gawayn</i> (2429a) | xxSxxSs |
| | “‘But your girdle,” said Gawain’ | |
| | (f) <i>And al I gif yow, Gawayn</i> (1383a) | xxxSxSs |
| | ‘and I give you everything, Gawain’ | |

Item (16a) is a VS instance with a direct object in the following b-verse. The poet rejected the alternative in (16b), which has SV order and a second long dip. As in other verse types, VS order provides formulaic introductions to direct discourse. In nine variants like (16c–d), a semantically inessential exclamation alliterates with the term designating the speaker. Item (16d) realizes the Ss sequence as an anglicized French common noun. In the other seven variants, the Ss constituent is an anglicized form of Gawain's name.²¹ Substantive dialogue occurs instead of an exclamation in (16b). Gawain is the hearer rather than the speaker in (16f), and the phrase identifying the speaker is shifted to the b-verse. Variants like (16e–f) show how formulaic strategies can be adapted to new metrical contexts.

Order of Noun and Adjective

Archaic noun-adjective order appears in a single A2 verse, item (17a).

- | | | |
|------|---|-----------------|
| (17) | (a) <i>Kny3tez ful cortays</i> (539a) | SxxSs |
| | ‘very courteous knights’ | |
| | (b) <i>*Ful cortays kny3tez</i> | xSxSx (type A1) |
| | (c) <i>Into þe comly castel</i> (1366a; cf. 934a) | xxxSxSs |
| | ‘into the beautiful castle’ | |
| | (d) <i>Of þe wyne worschip</i> (1032a) | xxSxSs |
| | ‘of the delightful honor’ | |

The constructed item (17b) lacks the required long dip. In (17c), either the noun or the adjective could provide a verse-final Ss word to compensate for the lack of a second long dip. The poet could have used archaic word order here but did not. In (17d), archaic word order would yield the pattern xxSxSx, a variant characteristic of the b-verse (with the secondary stress of *worschip* neutralized in the medial dip).

Predicate Adjective Constructions

Archaic placement of an adjective before the copula occurs in item (18a).

- | | | |
|------|--|------------------|
| (18) | (a) <i>Miry watz þe mornynge</i> (1691a) | SxxxSs (type A2) |
| | ‘merry was the morning’ | |
| | (b) <i>*Pe mornynge watz miry</i> | xSxxSx (type A1) |

Since the -y suffix of *miry* is unstressed (section 8.3), the normal word order of (18b) would overlap the most common b-verse pattern, xSxxSx.

Placement of Adverbs

An alliterating adverb precedes the verb it modifies in (19a), (19c), and (19e).

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|----------|
| (19) | (a) | <i>Bot styþly he start forth</i> (431a) | xSxxSs |
| | | ‘but calmly he started forth’ | |
| | (b) | <i>*Bot he start forth styþly</i> | xxSxSs |
| | (c) | <i>And runyschly he raȝt out</i> (432a) | xSxxxSs |
| | | ‘and fiercely he reached out’ | |
| | (d) | <i>*And he raȝt out runyschly</i> | ?xxSxSxs |
| | (e) | <i>Baldely þay blw þrys</i> (1362a) | SxxxSs |
| | | ‘vigorously they blew the capture signal’ | |
| | (f) | <i>*Þay blw þrys baldely</i> | *xSxSxs |

The verse-final Ss word group in (19a) provided more salient contrast with the b-verse than *styþly* in (19b), the alternative with modern word order. In (19c), modern placement of the adverb would yield (19d). This might be an acceptable Db variant but (19c) was apparently preferable. In the verse as we have it, the adjacent stressable suffixes *-ish* and *-ly* are easier to scan because stress neutralization applies automatically to both of them. Verb-adverb order in (19e) would yield (19f), which has a prominently stressed noun in the medial dip.

8.9 A2 Variants with a Third Alliteration on the Secondary Lift

The Old English metrical system ruled out alliteration on the secondary lift in types A2, Da, and Db.²² This constraint no longer applies in SGGK.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|--------|
| (20) | (a) | <i>Sumwhyle wyth wodbos</i> (721a) | xSxxSs |
| | | ‘sometimes with forest-trolls’ | |
| | (b) | <i>And fer o(ue)r þe French flod</i> (13a) | xSxxSs |
| | | ‘and far over the French sea (= English Channel)’ | |

The Ss sequence is realized as a compound in (20a) and as a word group in variants like (20b).²³ In the Middle English b-verse, the second primary lift does not usually alliterate but may alliterate optionally (section 5.7). The same kind of option is available on a secondary lift in the Middle English a-verse.

8.10 Doubtful Alliterative Patterns

There is a single manuscript instance of type A2 with alliteration on the secondary lift and no alliteration on the second primary lift.

- (21) (a) *Lurkkez quyl þe daylyzt* (1180a) SxxxSs
 ‘lurks while the daylight (gleams)’
 (b) *#Lurkkez quyl þe [luflych] lyzt* (cf. C 1486a) SxxxSxs

Alliteration on *lyzt* in *daylyzt* is not inherently problematic.²⁴ Since primary lifts are distinguished from secondary lifts by obligatory alliteration, however, a type A2 verse like (21a) would be incompatible with coherence of the metrical system. An alternative scansion as SxxxxS is implausible because this pattern has no Old English precedent. Item (21a) looks like a trivialization of (21b), where substitution of *luflych* ‘lovely’ yields an acceptable type Db variant with triple alliteration (section 9.6).

In SGGK we find a few manuscript verses with the pattern (x)xxxSs, which corresponds to the Old English A3 subtype xx/Ss.

- (22) (a) *ǣr hē þone / grundwong* (Beo 1496a) (x)xx/Ss
 ‘before he (could see) the sea-bottom’
 (b) *hwilon hē on / bord scēat* (Maldon 270a; cf. 224a, 239a) xxx/S:s
 ‘at times he threw (a spear) into a shield’
 (c) *And þuȝt hit a bold(e) burn(e)* (G 843a) ?xxxxSS
 ‘and thought it a bold knight’
 (d) *#And þuȝt hit a burn ful bold* (cf. C 1372a) xxxxSxS
 (e) *#Bot [hendly] in his on[e] hond(e)* (206a) xSxxxSxs
 ‘but graciously in his one hand’
 (f) *#To yow þat, I wot [swyþe] wel* (G 1542a) xxxxSxxS
 ‘to you who, I know very well, (have more skill)’
 (g) *#Ogh(e) to a ȝonk(e) þynk [ond ȝep]* (1526a; cf. 951a) xxxSxxS
 ‘should (demonstrate) to a young, lusty thing’
 (h) *A heȝ(e) ernde and a hasty* (G 1051a) xSSxxSx
 ‘an important errand and a pressing (one)’
 (i) *Thenne þe knyȝt con* (G 2212a) *xxxSS
 ‘then the knight began’
 (j) *#Then(ne) þe cortayse knyȝt || con calle ful hyȝe* (cf. 539a)
 ‘then the courtly knight began to call out very loudly’

A verse type of the form (x)xx/Ss, represented by (22a), is reliably attested in Old English poetry. *Beowulf* contains no variants with a word group in the second foot, however.²⁵ Variants like (22b) do occur in late poems like *Maldon* and might have survived into the fourteenth century. Given the rarity of apparent examples in SGGK, however, the status of a given variant like (22c) is questionable, as with apparent examples of type C in the a-verse. Item (22c) can be regularized with a formulaic emendation, as in (22d). The remaining emendations add vague intensifiers. Item (22g) also adds *ond* ‘and.’ The cited analogue has *ȝep* alliterating with *ȝong* in a description of the same lady. For the syntax, compare (22h). Item (22i)

is suspect because its verse-final auxiliary is in close syntactic composition with the governed infinitive *calle* in the b-verse. The major syntactic break of the line normally falls between a-verse and b-verse, so the second alliteration in (22i) has been acquired by sacrificing the expected caesura. Putter and Stokes place *con* in the b-verse without emending the a-verse. I suggest adding *cortayse* ‘courtly,’ as in (22j).

8.11 Consequences of Eliminating Verse-Initial Compound Feet

Employment of types A2a and E in the Old English system made it necessary to impose syntactic rules for verses with three metrically significant stresses (section 3.9).

- 1 The major syntactic break of the verse must not occur within a compound foot.
- 2 When two fully stressed words realize a compound foot, the first word must alliterate to mark its metrical predominance.

These syntactic rules were no longer necessary after types A2a and E had died out. The first two lifts of a Middle English a-verse were easily identified as the primary ones because no surviving pattern had a secondary lift between primary lifts. Elimination of secondary lifts in non-final position also made it easier to identify words with low but significant prominence as occupants of a medial dip, even when they alliterated (section 6.3). It was only a short step to introduction of a new metrical constant. The Old English constant of two word feet was replaced by a Middle English constant of two primary lifts. The new constant provided more natural scansion for Middle English types B and C, in which the second lift was realized more often as a syllable with prominent stress.

Like their Old English antecedents, Middle English verse types represent metrical norms and allow for some mismatch. The syllable on an s position normally has less prominent phrasal stress than the syllable on the preceding S position, but not always. In *Beowulf*, for example, the type C pattern (x)x/Ssx has unusual variants like 2980b, *ðā ge-/bēah cyning* ‘then fell the king,’ where the root syllable of a finite verb occupies the S position and the more prominent noun root occupies the s position. It is the restricted frequency of such variants, not their absence, that justifies representation of Old English type C as (x)x/Ssx. In SGGK, a-verses with three prominently stressed syllables alliterate on the first two in the vast majority of cases and seldom on the first and third only. When that

alliterative pattern occurs, the medial stressed constituent normally has intermediate prominence and is suitable for placement in a medial dip. When an a-verse has three metrically significant alliterations, I will always locate the first two alliterations on primary lifts. Occasional instances of the **phrasal stress** pattern S ... s ... S will be analyzed as mismatches to the metrical **prominence** pattern S ... S ... s. This approach to scansion recognizes a human tendency to **internalize** rules rather than to memorize isolated facts (section 1.9). The proposed rule for the arrangement of lifts could hardly be simpler and would be easy to internalize.

8.12 Old English Origins of Middle English Type Da

Old English type Da, introduced in section 3.6, is typically realized as a stressed simplex word followed by a compound. The second foot in this type has the pattern Ssx, the pattern of highest frequency for Old English compounds. The first foot may be monosyllabic, as in (23a), or trochaic, as in (23b), an example of expanded type Da.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------|
| (23) | (a) <i>wearp / wælfyre</i> (Beo 2582a)
'spewed slaughter-fire' | S/Ssx |
| | (b) <i>sīde / sēnæssas</i> (Beo 223a)
'large sea-headlands' | Sx/Ssx |
| | (c) <i>heard / hēr cumen</i> (Beo 376a)
'the brave (man) having come here' | S/S:sx |
| | (d) <i>(Ne ge-)mealt / (him se) mōdsefa</i> (Beo 2628a)
'his mind did not fail' | (xx)S/(xx)Ssx |

The compound foot can be occupied by a word group, as in (23c). **Extrametrical** syllables may appear before the first foot (in anacrusis) and also before the second foot. Item (23d) realizes both possibilities. Variants like (23d) are scanned with an initial S foot and their medial unstressed syllables are excluded from the basic pattern as extrametrical. Only variants like (23b), with the first alliteration on a trochaic word, are classified as expanded Da (Dax). For ease of comparison I adopt the same criteria for Dax verses in SGGK.

When newly indispensable **function words** crowded into the verse, we assume that the poet would place them at first in traditional locations. Old English type Da permitted long dips in two locations and its medial dip was suitable for further extension. This medial dip had always accommodated independent function words more freely than the Old English anacrusis position, largely restricted to prefixes and prefixal negative particles. In (23d), for example, the unstressed constituents in anacrusis are

a prefixal negative and a prefix, while the unstressed constituents in the medial dip are both independent function words.

For Middle English type Da we will use the notation (x)S(x)Ssx, essentially the same notation as for Old English type Da but without the slash for the foot boundary. As in all Middle English heavy types, the first two lifts are primary and the third lift is secondary. The parenthesized (x) positions are filled more freely than in *Beowulf* and are sometimes extended beyond Old English limits, though less often than in type A1.

Within the brief compass of *Maldon* we find two expanded Da variants in which the medial dip has been extended to three syllables.

- (24) (a) *wyrca(n) / (þone) wiðagan* (102a) Sx/(xx)Ssx
 'to form the shield-wall'
 (b) *Offa / (þone) sēlidan* (286a) Sx/(xx)Ssx
 'Offa (slew) the seafarer'

When a higher frequency of function words created variants like (24a–b), which have no precedents in *Beowulf*, the new variants were perceived as complex and found their appropriate location in the a-verse. After word-foot principles had been lost, the reasons for distribution of Da variants were obscured, but poets could still perceive that their stress patterns were characteristic of the a-verse. As the evolving asymmetries between a-verse and b-verse were regularized, type Da was shifted entirely to the a-verse.

Item (25a) is an expanded Da verse from *Beowulf* with an Ssx compound in the second foot. Item (25b), a similar Middle English variant, has obligatory lengthening of the medial dip.

- (25) (a) *sīde / sēnæssas* (Beo 223a) = item (23b) Sx/Ssx
 (b) *Tortors and trulofez* (G 612a) SxxSsx
 'turtledoves and trueloves'
 (c) *Scēotend / Scyldinga* (Beo 1154a) Sx/Ssx
 'Scylding (spear-)casters'
 (d) *Bot þrete is vnþryuande* (G 1499a) xSxxSsx
 'but compulsion is ignoble'

In the Old English variant represented by (25c), the Ssx word has a long medial syllable with light subordinate stress. Item (25d) continues this kind of variant, with the medial dip extended and realization of the optional dip in the old position of *anacrusis*.

Old English Dax variants like (26a), with an adjective-noun group in the second foot, require alliteration on the adjective to show that the noun is metrically subordinated.

- (26) (a) *drēfan / dēop water* (Beo 1904a) Sx/S:sx
 ‘drive (through) deep water’
 (b) *On botounz of þe bryȝt grene* (G 220a) xSxxxSsx
 ‘on buttons of the bright green’
 (c) *Offred and honoured* (G 593a) SxxSsx
 ‘offered and celebrated’

Item (26b) continues this kind of variant, with unstressed function words added as usual. The alliterating adjectives are semantically inessential in these Old and Middle English verses. In *Beowulf*, 96 percent of the Da verses realize the Ssx *foot* as a single word (487/507). In SGGK, the percentage of Da verses ending with an Ssx word remains substantial, at 84 percent (79/94, not including instances with triple alliteration). Anglicized French borrowings with the metrical value Ssx helped maintain the preferred realizations, providing 55 of the 79 instances. A representative example is (26c).

Beowulf contains 312 a-verses of type Da, including 191 instances with the S/Ssx pattern (61 percent) and 121 with the expanded pattern Sx/Ssx (39 percent). In SGGK there are only 16 Da variants with the first alliteration on a monosyllable (excluding variants with triple alliteration), as compared with 78 expanded Dax variants with the first alliteration on a trochaic word. Dax variants have achieved a frequency of 83 percent in SGGK, as compared with 39 percent for *Beowulf*. This frequency rise would be expected when trochaic words no longer took type Da beyond optimal length, contributing instead to dips that were metrically desirable.

8.13 Distribution of Da Variants in SGGK

Table 8.3 provides statistics for Middle English Da verses in the corpus of limited ambiguity. Verses with unusual alliterative patterns are excluded for separate discussion.

For variants with a long medial dip, the number of syllables in the initial dip peaks at one. For variants with a long initial dip, the number of syllables in the medial dip peaks at one. In type A2 we observed a preference for one and only one long dip. The same preference is evident in type Da.

Table 8.4 provides statistics for all Da verses with normal alliteration.

The low frequency of variants with two long dips persists in Table 8.4. Variants with one *short dip* and one long dip are preferred to variants that lack a short dip. The preferred location for the long dip is the medial one, which corresponds to the more tolerant dip in Old English type Da. Only

Table 8.3 *Distribution of Da Variants in the Smaller Corpus (49 instances)*

medial						
→	0	1	2	3	4	5
initial						
↓						
0			4	6	2	
1		3	9	8	2	
2		3	3	2		
3	1	4	1			
4		1				

Table 8.4 *Distribution of Da Variants in the Larger Corpus (94 instances)*

medial					
→	0	1	2	3	4
initial					
↓					
0			7	9	2
1		3	10	18	6
2	1	10	5	4	1
3	3	11	3		
4		1			

four instances lack a medial dip, as compared with eighteen lacking an initial dip. The variant of highest frequency has a 1/3 dip structure, which is common in type A1 b-verses. The variant next highest in frequency has a 3/1 dip structure, which is common in hypermetrical b-verses. The secondary lift in type Da can clearly bear the burden of contrast with the b-verse.

8.14 Archaic Word Order in Middle English Type Da

Placement of Finite Verbs

SOV word order occurs in (27a–c), which end with an anglicized French word.

- (27) (a) *And þay hym kyst and conueyed* (596a) xxxSxSsx
 ‘and they kissed him and escorted him’
 (b) *Bot þe renk hit renayed* (1821a) xxSxSsx
 ‘but the knight refused it’
 (c) *Þe mon hem maynteines* (2053a) *xSxSsx
 ‘the man supports them’
 (d) *#Þe [myry] mon hem maynteines* (cf. 1263a) xSxxxSsx

Here as in other verse types archaic order keeps a monosyllabic unstressed pronoun out of final position. In (27a), placing *him* in the initial dip also avoids a second long dip. In (27b), SOV order creates the medial dip that has become the norm in Middle English type Da. In (27c), SOV order places the pronoun appropriately but the verse lacks a long dip. As emended in (27d), the verse has the most common Da pattern, with weakly stressed *mon* alliterating in the dip. Plausible emendations are available for an additional pair of Da variants without a long dip.²⁶

Item (28a), the only Da variant of its kind in SGGK, employs an archaic construction with an infinitive preceding its auxiliary.

- (28) (a) *Gestes þat go wolde* (G 1127a) SxxSsx
 ‘guests that would go’
 (b) *ge- / gān wolde* (Beo 1277b) x/Ssx
 ‘would go’
 (c) **Gestes þat wolde go* *SxxxxS

Compare (28b), an Old English type C variant employing ancestors of the same words in the same construction. Normal word order in the Middle English example would yield (28c), with the pattern *SxxxxS. There is no precedent in Old English poetry for this pattern or for any other pattern with an initial lift, unstressed medial syllables, and a final lift.²⁷ Employment of archaic word order to avoid such patterns makes it clear that apparent examples in SGGK are *dispreferred* if not unmetrical.²⁸

VS Order

VSO order occurs in a pair of Da variants, with the Ssx sequence realized as a word group in (29a) and as a native Ssx word in (29c).

- (29) (a) *Penn þurled þay ayþer þik side* (1356a) xSxxxxSsx
 ‘then they pierced each thick side’
 (b) **Penn þay þurled ayþer þik side* xxSxxxxSsx
 (c) *Refourme we our(e) forwardes* (378a) xSxxxxSsx
 ‘let us restate our agreements’

Item (29a), with VSO order, was apparently preferable to (29b), which has normal SVO order and two long dips. VSO order has the force of an

imperative in (29c). SVO order would not have the same force and was rejected for non-metrical reasons.

Order of Noun and Adjective

Noun-adjective word order is attested in (30a–b).

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|------------|
| (30) | (a) | <i>And 3e ar knyzt comlokest</i> (G 1520a) | xxxSSsx |
| | | ‘and you are a most handsome knight’ | |
| | (b) | <i>I wer(e) a knyzt kowarde</i> (G 2131a) | xxxSSsx |
| | | ‘I would be a cowardly knight’ | |
| | (c) | <i>*I wer(e) a kowarde knyzt</i> | xxxSxxS |
| | (d) | <i>þeah ðe hīo / ænlicu sȳ</i> (Beo 1941b) | (xx)x/Sxxs |
| | | ‘although she may be beautiful’ | |
| | (e) | <i>A castel þe comlokest</i> (G 767a) | xSxxSsx |
| | | ‘a castle (which was) the most beautiful’ | |
| | (f) | <i>*þe comlokest castel</i> | xSxxSs |

These Da variants with a long initial dip and no medial dip were apparently preferable to alternatives with normal word order like (30c), which may look at first glance like a common type B variant. If, as we assume, alliterative tradition resisted metrical change, the *Gawain* poet’s avoidance of this B variant has a historical explanation. A long word-medial syllable had subordinate stress in Old English. The *Beowulf* poet rarely places a long medial syllable on the first x position of an Sxxs foot. Old English B variants like item (30d) occur only three times in the poem. A somewhat unusual noun-adjective construction places the adjective verse-finally in (30e). Item (30f), with normal syntax and neutralization of stress on *-lok*, would be a type A2 variant, acceptable but apparently not preferable.

8.15 Da Variants with a Third Alliteration on the Secondary Lift

Several type Da verses have alliteration on all three lifts.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|----------|
| (31) | (a) | <i>Þe loke to þis luflace</i> (2438a) | xSxxxSsx |
| | | ‘a glance at this love-lace’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Bot þis foule fox felle</i> (1944a) | xxSxSsx |
| | | ‘but this foul fox-fur’ | |
| | (c) | <i>I hope þat þi hert arze</i> (2301a) | xSxxxSsx |
| | | ‘I expect that your heart cowers’ | |
| | (d) | <i>Braydez out a bryzt bront[e]</i> (1584a) | SxxxSsx |
| | | ‘draws out a bright sword’ | |
| | (e) | <i>Now nezeþ þe N[e]w(e) 3ere</i> (1998a) | xSxxxSsx |
| | | ‘now the New Year draws nigh’ | |

In (31a), the secondary constituent of the compound provides a perfect match for the verse-final s position. In (31b), *fox felle*, though spelled open, was probably stressed as a compound word. In (31c), the finite verb *ar3e*, which alliterates with more prominent *hope* and *hert*, realizes the sx sequence. In variants like (31d), the lexical noun at the end of the verse is preceded by a semantically inessential adjective.²⁹ Without the adjective, these would scan as type A1 variants characteristic of the b-verse. Item (31e) would not scan normally if weakly stressed *now* occupied a lift. With alliterating *now* in the dip, the verse scans as type Da. The proposed scansion for (31e) is supported by evidence from the b-verse.³⁰

8.16 Anomalous Da Variants with Single Alliteration

- (32) (a) *Bot mon most I algate* (141a) xSxxSsx (type Da)
 ‘but in any case I must (consider him) a man’
 (b) *#Bot mon most I [metely]* (cf. 1004b) xSxxSxs (type Db)
 (c) *ƿe [lenkƿe] of an eln3erde ƿe large [hed(e)] hade* (210)
 ‘the large head had the length of a measuring stick (one ell long)’
 (d) *#ƿe hed of an eln3erde ƿe [huge] lenƿe hade* (cf. 208b, 857b)

With *algate* in (32a) emended to *metely* ‘properly,’ (32b) becomes an unremarkable variant of type Db with two alliterations. In item (32c), Tolkien and Gordon transpose *lenkƿe* and *hed(e)* to provide alliteration on *l-* for the line, a doubtful improvement not accepted by Putter and Stokes. Without emendation, the a-verse scans straightforwardly as type Da and the problem shifts to the b-verse, which alliterates inappropriately on *l-*. I would suggest emending *large* to *huge*, which yields an acceptable type A1 b-verse with alliteration on both lifts. The huge axe mentioned two lines above has an appropriately huge axe-head. Here as in other cases double alliteration marks the boundaries of a heavy dip that contains a prominent word subordinated by the Rhythm Rule (section 5.7).

8.17 Light Type DL

Old English type D includes a light variant that I will call type DL.³¹ This variant had a final foot of the form Sxx. Item (33a) is a representative example.

- (33) (a) *ƿeond / treddode* (Beo 725b) S/Sxx (type DL)
 ‘the fiend trod’
 (b) *and comlych[e] ladi(e)z* (G 539b) xSxxSx (type A1)
 ‘and fair ladies’
 (c) *ƿo ladyes were* (G 950b; cf. 2030b) xSxxSx (type DL)
 ‘those ladies were’

Weak class II verb forms like *treddode* scan unambiguously as dactylic Sxx. Prehistoric shortening of the medial vowel, caused by loss of stress, rules out scansion as Sxx, and that scansion is ruled out independently by metrical evidence.³² Although dactylic Sxx words occurred in Old English, their numbers were restricted and few unambiguous examples survived the transition to Middle English. In the Middle English b-verse, reducible Sxx words scan as Sx in final position but sometimes scan as Sxx in medial position to supply the required long dip. Both possibilities are illustrated by distribution of the high-frequency form *ladies/ladies*. This reduces to Sx verse-finally in variants like (33b).³³ In the variants like (33c), the same form must scan as Sxx to provide the long dip.

Given two possibilities of scansion, we need a principled guide to reduction of the verse-final word in twenty-eight possible instances of type DL, represented by (34a–b).

- (34) (a) *With lordez and ladies* (49a) xSxxSxx (type DL)
 ‘with lords and ladies’
 (b) *Schot with his schulderez* (2318a; cf. 1138a) SxxSxx (type DL)
 ‘jerked with his shoulders’

If we reduce *ladies*, (34a) scans doubtfully as an instance of xSxxSx, the most common type A1 variant in the b-verse. Without reduction, the verse scans as xSxxSxx, continuing the pattern of Old English type DL. With verse-final reduction, nine of the twenty-eight instances (32 percent) would have type A1 patterns with high frequency in the b-verse (SxxSx and xSxxSx). The xSxxSx variants would include (34a) and seven other instances.³⁴ The SxxSx variants would be those like (34b). In type A1, the frequency of SxxSx in the a-verse is 1 percent and the frequency of xSxxSx is 4 percent. It seems best to analyze a-verses that end with dactylic words as type DL. This light type reflects a tendency to realize the fuller form of a word when it has prominent phrasal stress. At the end of the b-verse, of course, the fuller form Sxx is excluded by rule and the less natural scansion as Sx is required.

8.18 Alternative Word Orders in Type DL

Items (35a), (35b), and (35d) employ word orders of special interest.

- (35) (a) *Hunt{ere}z hem hardened* (1428a) SxxSxx
 ‘hunters encouraged them’
 (b) *Pen scher pay out þe schulderez* (1337a) xSxxxSxx
 ‘then they cut out the shoulders’

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (c) * <i>Pen þay scher out þe schulderez</i> | xxSxxSxx |
| (d) <i>For to sette þe sylueren</i> (124a) | xxSxxSxx |
| 'to set the silver dishes (or bowls)' | |
| (e) * <i>Pe sylu{ere}n for to sette</i> | xSxxxSx |

Item (35a) has SOV order. Here archaic syntax keeps a monosyllabic pronoun out of final position. Rhetorical VSO order occurs in (35b). This order avoids a variant with two long dips, constructed as (35c). A Da variant with two long dips is acceptable, as (35d) shows, but in this verse *for* and *to* cannot be separated and *þe* must stand before its associated noun. The OV construction in (35e) is a grammatically acceptable alternative to (35c). In non-final position, however, the *-ere-* sequence of *sylu{ere}n* would normally be reduced (section 5.5). With the usual reduction, (35e) would scan as xSxxxSx, a pattern characteristic of the b-verse.

8.19 Anomalous Instances of Single Alliteration

Item (36a) is the only manuscript instance of type DL with alliteration on the first lift only.

- (36) (a) *Kny3tez and swyerez* (824a)
 'knights and squires'
 (b) #*Kny3tez and [comly] swy{ere}z* (cf. 1629a) SxxSxxSxx

The most common alliterative partner for *kny3t* is *comly* 'fair, fairly.' With semantically inessential *comly* added, reduction of the verse-final word yields an ordinary hypermetrical a-verse (section 9.10).

8.20 Summary

The hypothesis of continuous development provides historical explanations for metrical features identified by Putter, Jefferson, and Stokes. Their heavy elements at verse ending can be explained as continuations of Old English secondary lifts.³⁵ Their *two-beat* metrical constant can be explained as a constant of two primary lifts that evolved from the Old English constant of two word feet.³⁶ Obligatory double *alliteration* in the Middle English a-verse can be explained as regularization of a strong tendency in the Old English variants that survived. After elimination of types E and A2a, which imposed unsustainable constraints on *function words*, there were no heavy verses with a secondary lift between primary lifts. The first two lifts were always primary and the third was always secondary. With the primary lifts marked so clearly by alliteration, stressed

words could occupy medial dips with little risk of confusion. Stress neutralization in the medial dip, which occurred occasionally in *Beowulf*, had become more common in the era of SGGK. There had never been an Old English verse type with an *s position* before the first *S position*.³⁷ Stress was neutralized in any word before the first *alliteration*, which was assigned to an initial dip.³⁸ In the era of *Maldon*, a strengthening SVO norm already promoted shifting of words with intermediate prominence from a verse-final lift to an initial or medial dip (section 4.11). The Middle English neutralization rule evolved naturally from its Old English origins.

The metrical stress on suffixes like *-ly* plays a major role in this chapter. Words containing these suffixes had the stress patterns of compounds but did not decline in productivity. Suffixed forms made it possible to maintain traditional realizations of heavy verse types. Anglicized French borrowings provided additional ways to realize the last two stresses of a heavy verse within a single word. The subordinate word stress in borrowings and suffixed forms provided an optimal match for the secondary lift.

Old English disyllables with weak secondary stress, which sometimes scanned as Ss, could also stand at the end of the b-verse, where unambiguous Ss words were excluded. In SGGK, all disyllables with weak secondary stress were excluded from the end of the b-verse. In Middle English type A2, the subordinate stress of a verse-final Ss word realized a third lift unambiguously, providing effective contrast with the b-verse, which had two and only two lifts. The subordinate stress of a verse-final Ssx word performed the same function in type Da. A second long dip was not required for contrast in these heavy types and employment of unstressed syllables stayed closer to traditional norms. The *Gawain* poet employed archaic syntax to avoid a second *long dip* in heavy verses, usually by shifting an unstressed word from the initial dip to the tolerant medial dip. The preferred Da variant in SGGK, with three syllables in the medial dip, did not occur in *Beowulf* but had already developed in *Maldon*.

Type Db and the Hypermetrical A-Verse

9.1 Origins of Middle English Type Db¹

Old English type Db is introduced in [section 3.8](#). Like type Da, type Db has two primary lifts and a secondary lift. The second foot in type Db has the pattern Sxs or Sxxs.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|-----------|
| (1) | (a) | <i>hār / hilderinc</i> (Beo 1307a)
‘old battle-warrior’ | S/Sxs |
| | (b) | <i>frēcne / fengelād</i> (Beo 1359a)
‘dangerous fen-path’ | Sx/Sxs |
| | (c) | <i>sēon / sibbegedriht</i> (Beo 387a)
‘to see the troop of friends’ | S/Sxxs |
| | (d) | <i>oncȳð / eorla gehwæm</i> (Beo 1420a)
‘grief to each earl’ | Sx/Sx:x-s |

Item (1a) represents the most common Db pattern, which begins with a stressed monosyllable. Expanded Db, represented in (1b), begins with a trochaic word. Long Db, (item 1c), has an Sxxs foot. Expanded long Db represents an extreme departure from the type A₁ norm of two stresses and four metrical positions. Item (1d) is the only example in *Beowulf*.

As the number of indispensable [function words](#) increased, we assume, verse types with convenient locations for function words would be exploited to the full while less useful types would decline in frequency. Old English type Db permitted long initial, medial, and final dips, features that became increasingly useful as the frequency of function words rose. Type Da shows diminished frequency in SGGK, representing 5 percent of total a-verses (94/2,025), as compared with 9 percent in *Beowulf*. Type Db represents only 3 percent of total a-verses in *Beowulf* but enjoys an enhanced frequency of 10 percent in SGGK (194/2,025).

9.2 Traces of Archaic Foot Structure

The second foot of Old English long Db has the pattern of an Sxxs word like *sibbe-gedriht*, which is compounded from a trochaic constituent and a prefixed monosyllable. A word group occupying an Sxxs foot normally imitates the structure of a compound. Among the long Db verses in *Beowulf*, sixteen out of twenty such groups have a trochaic word followed by a prefixed monosyllable. These groups are notated as Sx:x-s. The favored structure of the word group in (1d) compensates to some extent for the inherent complexity of the expanded long Db pattern.

In Middle English type B, the old preference for word groups imitating the structure of a compound evolved into a rule that words with the pattern xS must stand at the end of the verse (section 7.8). In Middle English type Db, similarly, an xS word appears twenty-seven times at the end of the verse, as in (2a–b), but never on the second lift, which corresponds to the first lift of type B.²

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (2) | (a) <i>And I schal hyȝ[e] me hom aȝayn</i> (G 2121a) | xxxSxxSxs
'and I shall hurry home again' |
| | (b) <i>Līȝt luflych adoun</i> (G 254a) | SSxxs
'come graciously down' |
| | (c) <i>(Ā-)rīs, / rīces weard</i> (Beo 1390a) | (x)S/Sxs
'Arise, guardian of the kingdom' |
| | (d) <i>ȝat he beknew cortaysly</i> (G 903a) | xxxSSxs
'that he courteously made it known' |

In Old English poetry, a prefixed monosyllable can also appear on the first lift of a Db verse, with the prefix in anacrusis. There are seven variants like (2c) in *Beowulf*. Item (2d) is the only comparable variant in SGGK.³ In scansions for Middle English type Db, I retain lower-case *s* for the third lift, as in types A2 and Da. The slash is deleted as usual from the Middle English scansions.

A decline in the productivity of compounding drastically reduced the frequency of compounds suitable for type Db, but Sxs and Sxxs sequences could still be realized with native suffixed words or anglicized French borrowings. Such words appear verse-finally in (3a–c).

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (3) | (a) <i>Debated[e] busily</i> (68a) | xSxxSxs
'debated busily' |
| | (b) <i>All(e) þe spechez of specialté</i> (1778a) | xxSxxSxxs
'all the speeches of fondness' |
| | (c) <i>Your honour, your hendelayk</i> (1228a) | xSxxSxs
'your honor, your courtliness' |

Among 194 instances of type Db in the poem, 40 are like (3a), with a stressed native suffix on the s position; and 38 are like (3b), with the subordinate stress of an anglicized French word on the s position. The frequency of Db variants with a native compound has declined sharply. There are only four instances like (3c).⁴ On the other hand, the *Gawain* poet still realizes the Sxs and Sxxs sequences as a single word with substantial frequency: 42 percent (82/194), as compared with 53 percent in *Beowulf*.

9.3 Evolution of Alliterative Patterns in Types B and Db

In the Old English a-verse, the *Beowulf* poet provides double alliteration in 30 percent of the type B variants that end with an Sxs word group (73/245). A representative example is (4a).

- (4) (a) *in / fȳres fepm* (Beo 185a) x/Sx:s
 ‘into the fire’s embrace’
 (b) *swylce / giōmorgyd* (Beo 3150a; cf. 2935a) xx/Sxs
 ‘likewise a mourning song’
 (c) *All(e) þe ilas of Anglesay* (G 698a) xxSxxSxs
 ‘all the isles of Anglesey’

Among forty-one otherwise similar a-verses with an Sxs compound, double alliteration occurs in (4b) and possibly in one other verse (2935a). During the Middle English period, when types B and Db were shifted wholesale to the opening half of the *line*, ideal variants for the new system were type B variants with two stressed words and type Db variants with the last two stresses in a single word. These realizations were well suited to the new minimum of two alliterations in the a-verse and the new metrical constant of two primary lifts. SGGK contains no B variants with an Sxs or Sxxs compound. This gap in the Middle English data might be due to chance, of course. To provide the mandatory second alliteration in type B, such variants would require self-alliterating compounds, which had never been common in alliterative poetry. There is one self-alliterating Sxs compound in SGGK, however, and it appears in type Db rather than in type B (item 4c). Here compounded *-ay*, a Germanic term for ‘island,’ adds a third alliteration on the secondary lift. Sxs compounds do not contain the *long dip* that provides valuable contrast with the b-verse in type B. In type Db, an additional lift and an additional dip provide contrast and a long dip is less urgently required before the third lift. In Old English type B, the secondary constituent of a compound provides an ideal occupant for the

secondary verse-final lift. Middle English type B ends with a primary lift that is less suitable for secondary constituents. The optimal location for a Middle English Sxs compound is accordingly in type Db. As we shall see, this type permits a third alliteration on the secondary lift. Placement of the unique self-alliterating compound in a Db variant, though surprising from an Old English perspective, emerges as the expected placement if we follow Middle English principles to their logical conclusions.

9.4 Distribution of Dip Structures in Type Db

Table 9.1 shows statistics for long dips in Db variants with double alliteration from the corpus of limited ambiguity. In the left-hand column, the digit before the slash represents the number of syllables in the initial dip

Table 9.1 *Distribution of Db Variants in the Smaller Corpus (81 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3
initial dip / medial dip ↓			
o/o		2	
o/1	1	1	1
o/2	9		
o/3	8		
o/4	1		
1/o		9	
1/1	2	6	
1/2	7	3	
1/3	9		
1/4	3		
2/o		1	
2/1	3	1	1
2/2	1	1	
3/o	2		
3/1	7		
3/2	2		
total	55	24	2

and the digit after the slash represents the number of syllables in the medial dip. Digits in the row at the top of the chart represent the number of syllables in the final dip. The bottom line provides totals for the final dip. The special importance of the final dip will become clear when we consider variants with triple alliteration.

The traditional limit of two syllables for non-medial dips is exceeded primarily in the initial dip and primarily when other dips are short or absent. Item (5a) is doubly anomalous.

- (5) (a) *Pen in any oþer þat I wot* (24a) xxSxSxxxS
 'than in any other that I know'
 (b) *#Pen in any oþer, I wot,* xxSxSxxS
 (c) *I am þe wakkeſt, I wot* (354a) xxxSxxS
 'I am the weakest, I know'

Item (5a) might appropriately be emended to (5b). Compare (5c), where *I wot*, with the syntax of an aside, keeps the second dip of a type B verse within the traditional limit. The relative prominence of metrically stressed syllables is somewhat difficult to assess in (5a). The main verb *wot* may seem more prominent, in isolation, than *oþer*, but *oþer* bears phrase-final stress in the verse as emended and an aside has low **prominence** relative to a main clause. If (5a) is authentic and *wot* has the most prominent phrasal stress, *wot* creates a **mismatch** on the s position, presumably an acceptable one (cf. **section 8.11**).

Table 9.2 provides statistics in the larger corpus for Db variants with alliteration on the primary lifts only.

Including all variants yields only one additional instance with a final dip exceeding the Old English limit and a long dip elsewhere in the verse.

- (6) (a) *Bot to take þe toruayle to myſelf* (1540a) xxSxxSxxxxS
 'but to take the trouble on myself'
 (b) *#Bot to take þe toruayle* xxSxxSsx (type Da)

In (6a), *to myſelf* seems entirely redundant. Semantically inessential words generally improve the meter and it is hard to see why the poet would use such words to create the only Db verse with three long dips. Emendation to (6b) might be appropriate. The overall distribution shows a clear preference for one and only one long dip, with other dips short or absent.⁵ Compare type Da, where the preferred variant has one long dip and one short dip (**section 8.13**). As in type Da, the preferred site for the long dip is the tolerant medial position.

Table 9.2 *Distribution of Db Variants in the Larger Corpus (194 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3	4
initial dip / medial dip ↓				
o/o		3		
o/1	1	10	2	
o/2	14	4		
o/3	12	1		
o/4	4			
1/o		13		
1/1	3	22	3	1
1/2	23	4		
1/3	26			
1/4	4			
1/5	1			
2/o	1	1		
2/1	5	2	1	
2/2	6	2	1	
2/3	1			
3/o	2			
3/1	13			
3/2	7			
3/3	1			
total	124	62	7	1

9.5 Archaic Word Order in Type Db

Order of Verb and Object

Like other a-verse patterns, type Db makes limited use of archaic syntax. There is a pair of instances with an object before the finite verb.

- (7) (a) *Pe lord(e) hym letted of þat* (1672a) xSxSxxs
 ‘the lord dissuaded him from that’
 (b) *And he hem raysed rekenly* (821a) xxxSxSxs
 ‘and he courteously had them rise’
 (c) **And he raysed hem rekenly* xxSxxSxs

In (7a), OV order places *him* in the tolerant medial dip, avoiding a final dip of three syllables. In (7b), ample contrast with the b-verse is provided by three lifts and three dips. The poet evidently preferred this variant to the one in (7c), a Db variant with two long dips and normal word order.

Placement of Non-Finite Verbs

In three Db variants an infinitive or participle appears before the finite verb.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| (8) | (a) <i>And fres er hit falle myȝt</i> (728a) | xSxxSxs |
| | ‘and froze before it could fall’ | |
| | (b) <i>*And fres er hit myȝt falle</i> | xSxxxSx |
| | (c) <i>And to poynte hit ȝet I pyned me</i> (1009a) | xxSxxxSxs |
| | ‘if perhaps I troubled myself to describe it’ | |
| | (d) <i>*And I pyned me to poynte hit ȝet</i> | xxSxxxSxs |
| | (e) <i>Blife broȝt watz hym drynk</i> (1684a) | SxSxxs |
| | ‘drink was brought to him merrily’ | |
| | (f) <i>*drynk watz broȝt hym blife</i> | xxSxSx |

The infinitive *falle* precedes its governing auxiliary in (8a). Item (8b), with normal word order, is a type A1 pattern characteristic of the b-verse. An infinitive clause precedes a finite main verb in (8c). The alternative with normal order, (8d), requires elision of *poynte hit* to avoid a third long dip, something that occurs in one dubious instance, item (6a). In (8c) as we have it, the final dip is unambiguously short. A past participle occurs before its governing auxiliary in (8e). Here the non-alliterating stressed word *drynk* is placed appropriately on an s position. Item (8f), the variant with normal order, would have the pattern xxSxSx, which is characteristic of the b-verse, along with less appropriate placement of *drynk* in the initial dip.

Placement of Adpositional Phrases

The *Gawain* poet places a prepositional phrase before the verb in (9a–c).

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| (9) | (a) <i>Wyth wele walt pay þat day</i> (485a) | xSxSxxs |
| | ‘with joy they spent that day’ | |
| | (b) <i>With polaynez piched þerto</i> (576a) | xSxxSxxs |
| | ‘with knee-armor attached to them’ | |
| | (c) <i>With bred blent þerwith</i> (1610a) | xSSxs |
| | ‘with bread blended in’ | |
| | (d) <i>Schalkez to schote at hym</i> (1454a) | SxxSxs |
| | ‘men (appeared) to shoot at him’ | |
| | (e) <i>#Schalkez at him to schote</i> | SxxxxSx |

The verb is finite in (9a). In (9b–c), the verbs are past participles. In all three examples, fronting of the prepositional phrase creates a major **syntactic break** between the alliterating words, isolating the Sxs or Sxxs portion of the verse as a coherent word group. Fronting of a prepositional phrase often removes a monosyllabic pronoun from final position, so we may suspect trivialization in (9d). The alternative (9f) has the type A1 pattern SxxxxSx, with an ultralong dip for contrast with the b-verse.

In nine long Db variants, **postpositional** phrases provide distinct Sxxs word groups and keep monosyllabic pronouns out of verse-final position.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|----------|
| (10) | (a) | <i>Lepe ly3tly me to</i> (292a; cf. 816a, 1002a) | SxSxxs |
| | | ‘leap quickly to me’ | |
| | (b) | * <i>Lepe to me ly3tly</i> | SxxsSs |
| | (c) | <i>Pe wy3e wynnnez hym to</i> (2050a) | xSxSxxs |
| | | ‘the knight goes to him’ | |
| | (d) | <i>Day tan hym bytwene hem</i> (977a) | xSxxSxs |
| | | ‘they take him between them’ | |
| | (e) | # <i>Day ta[ke]n hym [hem] bytwene</i> | xSxxxxSx |

In the variants like (10a), a postpositional phrase is preceded by an alliterating trochaic adverb that is semantically inessential. Alternatives like (10b), with normal word order, would have dip structures characteristic of the b-verse. Item (10b) could not actually appear in the closing half of the line because adverbs like *ly3tly* are unacceptable as line-final trochees. Verse-final *to* provides more salient contrast than the *-ly* suffix, however. Some variants like (10c) place an alliterating trochaic verb before the postpositional phrase.⁶ Syntactic trivialization seems likely in (10d), which has a monosyllabic pronoun in final position. With a postpositional phrase and a variant form of *tan*, we have (10e), a type A1 pattern with an ultralong medial dip. **Trivialization** might have proceeded by way of **haplology** in *hym hem*.

VS Order

Verb-subject order occurs with verbs of speaking in type Db, as in other verse types.

- | | | | |
|------|-----|--|-----------|
| (11) | (a) | <i>‘Bigog,’ quop þe grene kny3t</i> (390a; cf. 1263a, 1495a) | xSxxSxs |
| | | “‘Bigog,’ said the green knight’ | |
| | (b) | <i>Now ar þay stoken of sturne werk</i> (494a) | xxxSxxSxs |
| | | ‘now they are provided with serious work’ | |
| | (c) | <i>Schyre schedez þe rayn</i> (506a) | SxSxxs |
| | | ‘the rain falls sparkling’ | |

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| (d) <i>*þe rayn schedez schyre</i> | xxSxSx |
| (e) <i>Loude lazed he þerat</i> (909a; cf. 2092a) | SxSxxxS |
| 'he laughed loudly at that' | |
| (f) <i>As help me God and þe halydam</i> (2123a) | xSxxxxSxs |
| 'so help me God and the Holy Lady' | |

In the verses like (11a), a semantically inessential exclamation alliterates with an adjective characterizing the speaker. The major syntactic break, marked in this case by a comma, falls in the preferred location, between the primary lifts. Type Db allows for VS order after an adverb, as in (11b). VS order does metrical work in item (11c). Item (11d), with normal order, has the most common pattern for hypermetrical b-verses. In (11d), moreover, *rayn* is not lexically presupposed or semantically inessential and seems too prominent for placement in the dip. In the verse as we have it, *rayn* occupies an s position, the ideal location for a prominent non-alliterating word. In the variants like (11e), the major syntactic break stands after a fronted adverb in the preferred location between primary lifts. No alternative order with the same force would be available for (11f), which employs a VOS construction in an oath.

Placement of Adverbials

Some additional Db variants show leftward movement of an adverb or adverbial phrase.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (12) | (a) <i>Lizt luflych adoun</i> (254a; cf. 1306a, 1583a) | SSxxx |
| | 'alight down graciously' | |
| | (b) <i>Þe lady luflych[e] com</i> (1757a) | xSxSxxx |
| | 'the lady came graciously' | |
| | (c) <i>Deliuierly he dressed vp</i> (2009a) | SxxxxSxs |
| | 'he got up quickly' | |
| | (d) <i>*He dressed vp deliuierly,</i> | xSxxSxxx |
| | (e) <i>Bot her(e) yow lakked a lyttel, sir</i> (2366a) | xxxSxxSxs |
| | 'but you fell short a little here, sir' | |
| | (f) <i>*Bot yow lakked a lyttel her(e), sir</i> | xxSxxSxxx |

The verses like (12a) place an xS word in line-final position. Realization of adverbial *-e* provides a long dip for (12b). With normal word order, (12c) becomes (12d), also analyzable as type Db but with stresses in less appropriate locations. In the verse as we have it, *vp* occupies an s position and the less prominent suffix *-ly* is neutralized routinely in the dip. In (12e), removal of *here* from clause-final position avoids the problem in (12f), a dubious variant with three long dips.

9.6 Triple Alliteration in Type Db

The number of Db variants with alliteration on all three lifts is surprisingly large even in the corpus of limited ambiguity.

Table 9.3 differs strikingly from Table 9.1, the corresponding table for type Db with two alliterations. The traditional limit of two syllables for the final dip is exceeded far more often in Db variants with three alliterations.

Table 9.4 shows the corresponding distribution for all variants.

The contrasting trends in Table 9.2 and Table 9.4 are summarized in Table 9.5.

Among Db variants with double alliteration, frequency is highest for those with a final dip of one syllable, which continue the most common Old English type Db patterns (S/Sxs and Sx/Sxs). The next-highest frequency is for variants with a final dip of two syllables, which continue the less common Old English patterns (S/Sxxs and Sx/Sxxs). Frequency falls off sharply for variants with a final dip that exceeds the Old English limit of two syllables. Among Db variants with triple alliteration, frequencies for the most common traditional patterns are sharply lower and frequency is highest for traditional patterns with two syllables in the final dip. Final dips with three syllables, which exceed the traditional limit, have much higher frequency in variants with triple alliteration. The variant with an **ultralong** third dip represents an extreme departure from traditional norms and might require emendation.

Table 9.3 *Distribution of Db Variants with Triple Alliteration in the Smaller Corpus (43 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3
initial dip / medial dip ↓			
o/o		1	2
o/1		4	1
o/3	3		
1/o	1	11	2
1/1	1	5	4
½	1	2	1
2/1		2	2
total	6	25	12

Table 9.4 *Distribution of Db Variants with Triple Alliteration in the Larger Corpus (120 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3
initial dip / medial dip ↓			
o/o		2	2
o/1	1	22	3
o/2	2	1	4
o/3	6	2	
1/o	2	17	2
1/1	4	20	8
½	5	7	1
1/3	3		
2/o	1	1	
2/1		1	2
2/2	1		
total	25	73	22

Table 9.5 *Comparison of Db Variants with Double and Triple Alliteration*

Syllables in final dip	1	2	3	4	total
Double alliteration	123X	62X	7X	1X	193
Frequency	64%	32%	4%	< 1%	
Triple alliteration	25X	73X	22X	none	120
Frequency:	21%	61%	18%		

In Old English type A1, as we have observed (section 3.4), a medial dip of unusual character is normally bounded by demarcative alliteration. This technique was extended to other dips as the metrical system evolved. Aids to scansion of the third dip would have become more important as the frequency of type Db increased and its dips were extended.

9.7 Archaic Word Order in Db Variants with Triple Alliteration

Archaic word order improves the meter in some Db variants with alliteration on the secondary lift.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------|
| (13) | (a) <i>Wylde wordez hym warp</i> (1423a; cf. 1970a) | SxSxxs |
| | ‘uttered wild words to them’ | |
| | (b) <i>*warp hym wylde wordez</i> | SxSxxs |
| | (c) <i>Rugh ronkled chekez</i> (953a) | SSxxs |
| | ‘rough, wrinkled cheeks’ | |
| | (d) <i>#Rugh[e] ronkled[e] chekez</i> | SxSxxsx |
| | (e) <i>Bi contray cayrez þis knyzt</i> (734a; cf. 154a, 1695a) | xSxSxxs |
| | ‘this knight rides through the land’ | |
| | (f) <i>*þis knyzt cayrez bi contray</i> | xSSxxsx |
| | (g) <i>Hir brest bare bifore</i> (1741a) | xSSxxsx |
| | ‘her breast bare in front’ | |

OV order keeps a monosyllabic pronoun out of final position in the verses like (13a). With more normal word order, (13a) would be (13b), a hypermetrical a-verse with no initial dip and no long dip. Item (13c) is the only manuscript verse with these features in SGGK. I emend it out in (13d) by realization of plural endings on the adjective and participle. A prepositional phrase precedes the verb in the verses like (13e). Here the archaic order creates a major syntactic break, isolating the Sxxs portion of the verse as a coherent word group. Normal word order in (13e) would yield (13f), a hypermetrical variant with a monosyllabic initial dip, no medial dip, and a long final dip. Item (13g) is the only example of this pattern in SGGK.

A complex archaic construction creates a long dip in (14a).

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (14) | (a) <i>Welawynne_is þe wort</i> (518a, MS <i>wela wynne</i>) | SxSxxs |
| | ‘very joyful is the plant’ | |
| | (b) <i>*Þe wort is welawynne</i> | xSxSxxs |

This verse resembles exclamations with a subject noun and a dative object. The alternative order of (14b) would have been rejected for non-metrical reasons if (14a) had the same syntax as *woe is me!* If *welawynne* is an ordinary adjective, (14a) is a “tender is the night” construction. Item (14b) would then have more idiomatic word order, but it lacks a long dip and might have been rejected for that reason.

Rhetorical VSO order follows a sentence-initial adverb in item (15a).

- | | | |
|------|---|-----------|
| (15) | (a) <i>Þen(ne) hond{ele}d þay þe hoge hed</i> (1633a) | xSxxxSxs |
| | ‘then they handled the huge head’ | |
| | (b) ‘ <i>Kepe þe cosyn, quop þe kyng</i> ’ (372a) | SxxSxxxxs |
| | “‘take care, cousin,’ said the king’ | |
| | (c) ‘ <i>Madame, quop þe myrry mon</i> ’ (1263a) | SxxxxSxs |
| | “‘Madam,’ said the merry man’ | |
| | (d) <i>With blype blaunner ful bryzt</i> (155a) | xSxSxxs |
| | ‘with jolly fur most fair’ | |

In (15a), placing the pronoun subject after the verb avoids a Db variant with two long dips. In the VS clauses of (15b–c), words identifying the speaker alliterate with words spoken, a formulaic strategy used in several verse types. In (15d), a noun is preceded by one adjective and followed by another. Here a semantically inessential phrase with *ful* creates a type Db verse from a type A1 verse lacking the required long dip.

9.8 Doubtful Alliterative Patterning in Type Db

There are two apparent examples of type Db with single alliteration, (16a) and (16d).

- (16) (a) *Oft(e) he watz runnen at* (1727a) 'often he was run at'
 (b) *#Oft(e) he watz at runnen* SxxxSsx (type Da)
 (c) *pat 3e of spoken* (1242b) xxSSx (type C)
 'that you speak of'
 (d) *Wyl(e) N[e]w 3er[e] watz so 3ep* (60a) 'while new year was so fresh'
 (e) *#Wyl(e) New 3er[e] watz so [ne3ed]* xSxxxxSx (type A1)
 (f) *Now ne3ez þe N[e]w 3ere* (1998a) 'now the New Year draws nigh'

The stranded preposition *at* in (16a) is subordinated to the verb, which should alliterate but does not. When moved as in (16b), the preposition subordinates the verb and the verse becomes an ordinary Da variant. For the syntax and alliteration, compare (16c). Item (16d) can be regularized by replacement of *3ep* with *ne3ed*. The result, item (16e), scans normally as type A1. Middle English verbs of motion can use *be* rather than *have* in constructions with past participles. Compare (16f) for the alliteration.

There are six other manuscript verses in SGGK without alliteration on the second primary lift. All have alliteration on the secondary lift. Some look like trivializations of archaic NA order.

- (17) (a) *Suande þis wylde swyn* (1467a) *SxxxxxS
 'pursuing this wild boar'
 (b) *#Suande þis swyn wylde* (cf. 89b, C 1269b) SxxxSsx
 (c) *'Mary,' quop þat oper mon* (1942a, 2140a) *SxxxxxS
 '"Mary," said that other man'
 (d) *#'Mary,' quop þat mon oper* (cf. 2342b) SxxxSsx
 (e) *Cayrez bi sum oper kyth* (2120a) *SxxxxxS
 'go through some other land'
 (f) *#Cayrez bi sum kyth oper* SxxxSsx
 (g) *Chymbled o(ue)r hir blake chyn* (958a) *SxxxxxS
 'wrapped over her black chin'
 (h) *#Chymbled o(ue)r hir chyn blake* SxxxSsx

In (17b), (17d), (17f), and (17h), restoration of NA word order yields an ordinary Da pattern.

The prepositional phrase in (18a) might originally have stood in archaic position before the verb.

- (18) (a) *Kneled down bifor(e) þe kyng* (368a) *SxxxxxS
 ‘kneeled down before the king’
 (b) *#Befor(e) þe kyng kneled down* xxxSSxs

This manuscript verse does not correspond to an acceptable Old English verse type. Emended to (18b), the verse scans as type Db.

A more complex emendation seems to be required for item (19a).

- (19) (a) *Le(u)de, _on N[e]w 3erez ly3t* (1675a) *SxxxxS
 ‘sir, on New Year’s light’
 (b) *#Lede, _on New 3ere ly3tly* SxxxxSs (type A2)

Item (19b) deletes < z > from *3erez* in (19a) and adds a suffix to *ly3t*. As emended, the verse scans as type A2 and arguably makes better sense. Tolkien and Gordon define *ly3t* as ‘dawn’ but no analogues are cited and I can find none in works attributed to the *Gawain* poet. In the emended (19b), Bertilak assures Gawain that he can arrive at the Green Chapel easily (*ly3tly*) on New Year’s Day (*New 3ere*). *New 3ere*, an unusual instance of **semantic bleaching** in a phrase or compound, also appears in the medial dip of verse 1968a.

9.9 Origins of Middle English Hypermetrical A-Verse

The Old English hypermetrical a-verse consists of a stressed alliterating constituent followed by a normal verse, usually of type A1. The embedded normal verse functions as a compound of higher order and hypermetrical verses divide into two foot-like constituents (section 3.13). **Alliteration** is obligatory on the first two lifts and the last lift must not alliterate. Item (20a) is representative.

- (20) (a) *landes // (ond) locenra / bēaga* (Beo 2995a) Sx// (x)Sx/Sx
 ‘of land and linked rings’
 (b) *Whettez his whyte tuschez* (G 1573a) SxxSxxSx
 ‘whets his white tusks’

Item (20b) is a Middle English hypermetrical a-verse with the same stress pattern as (20a). In the notation for (20b), foot boundaries are removed as usual and the subordinate final lift becomes an s position.

In (21a), a large compound provides the embedded type A1 constituent of an Old English hypermetrical a-verse. Realization as a compound word

highlights the role of the embedded constituent as a word foot of higher order.

- | | | |
|------|--|------------|
| (21) | (a) <i>mon on // middan-/gearde</i> (Beo 2996a)
'a man on middle-earth' | S:x//Sx/Sx |
| | (b) <i>þat þe hende heuen-quene</i> (G 647a)
'that the gracious queen of heaven (received)' | xxSxSxsx |
| | (c) <i>Who bryngez vs þis beuerage</i> (G III2a)
'who is bringing us a drink?' | xSxxxSxsx |
| | (d) <i>under heuenryche</i> (G 2423b)
'under the kingdom of heaven' | xxSxSx |
| | (e) <i>bi his courtaysye</i> (G 1300b)
'by his courtesy' | xxSxSx |

Compounds still have value in the corresponding Middle English type because their subordinate constituents provide optimal matches for the subordinate lift and distinguish it effectively from the two primary lifts. In SGGK there are six similar variants like (21b) with a compound at the end of the verse.⁷ The final lift is marked equally well as subordinate in hypermetrical a-verses with a French borrowing anglicized to Sxsx, as in (21c) and twenty-five similar verses.⁸ Variants like (21b–c), with the two final stresses embodied in a single word, account for 39 percent of the hypermetrical a-verses that have normal alliteration in SGGK (33/85). This is a good deal higher than the corresponding frequency of 9 percent for *Judith* (3/35). As with hypermetrical b-verses (section 5.4), an enhanced frequency of preferred realizations helped to compensate for abandonment of clustering in poems like SGGK. In eight instances like (21d–e), the subordinate stress of an Sxsx word occupies the second S position of a common hypermetrical b-verse pattern, (x)xxSxSx.⁹ For hypermetrical b-verses, the frequency of instances with Sxsx words is only 3 percent (8/305). Sxsx words provide optimal matches for the Sxsx sequence of the hypermetrical a-verse but are less well suited to the SxSx sequence of the Middle English hypermetrical b-verse. In hypermetrical a-verses, Sxsx French borrowings outnumber Sxsx native compounds by twenty-five to seven. In hypermetrical b-verses, the compounds outnumber the borrowings by five to three. This suggests that the second stress in French borrowings was less prominent than the second stress in native compounds and less appropriate for the SxSx sequence of the b-verse. In non-final position, the weak final *-e* of an Sxsx borrowing is sometimes unrealized.¹⁰ Such non-realization is harder to identify in native Sxsx compounds. A less prominent second stress in the French borrowings would make them more vulnerable to loss of final *-e*.

9.10 Distribution of Dip Structures in Hypermetrical A-Verses

Table 9.6 shows the distribution in the smaller corpus for hypermetrical a-verses with two alliterating lifts. In accord with the principle of reduction (section 5.3), I assume that weak final *-e* is realized in words that acquire phrase-final stress at the end of the a-verse. Variants that end with weak *-e* are included in the smaller corpus. Such variants would become Db variants if the final *-e* was absent from the poet’s underlying form. I scan according to the manuscript in difficult cases as before.

Though the number of instances is not large, some trends are clear and they resemble those in Middle English type Db, the only other type with three locations for long dips. Two long dips are clearly not necessary. A long dip appears most often after the first alliterating word, the most tolerant traditional location in hypermetrical a-verses.

Table 9.7 provides statistics for all hypermetrical a-verses with two alliterating lifts.

Table 9.6 *Distribution of Hypermetrical A-Verses in the Smaller Corpus (32 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3
initial dip / medial dip ↓			
0/0	1		
0/1		3	1
0/2		2	1
0/3	1		
1/0	1		
1/1	1	1	1
1/2	1		1
1/3	8		
2/0	1		
2/1	1	1	
2/2	2		
2/3	1		
3/1	3		
total	21	7	4

Table 9.7 *Distribution of Hypermetrical A-Verses in the Larger Corpus (85 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3
initial dip / medial dip ↓			
o/o	2	2	
o/1		8	2
o/2	1	2	1
o/3	10		
o/4		1	
1/o	2	4	1
1/1	3	6	2
1/2	4	1	1
1/3	16		
2/o	1		
2/1	4	1	
2/2	3		
2/3	2		
3/1	4	1	
total	52	26	7

The most highly valued dip structure is 1/3/1, with a short initial dip, a long medial dip of three syllables, and a short final dip. The structure next highest in frequency, with ten attestations, has a o/3/1 arrangement of dups. Both structures have a single long dip in the most tolerant traditional location. In Middle English type A1 a-verses, long dups are often realized in non-traditional ways to provide contrast with the b-verse. In Middle English hypermetrical a-verses, many contrasting features are available and non-traditional dip structures are less urgently required.¹¹

9.11 Archaic Word Order in Hypermetrical A-Verses

Among the hypermetrical a-verses with two alliterations are a few instances with archaic syntax.

- (22) (a) *And rekenly hym reuerenced* (251a; cf. 723a, 2292a) xSxxxSxxS
 ‘and promptly paid him honor’
 (b) *Pat rap{ele}d is in roché grounde* (2294a) xSxxxSxxS
 ‘that is entwined in rocky ground’

- (c) **Pat is rap{ele}d in roché grounde*

(d) *And her(e) is kyd(de) cortaysye* (263a)
'and courtesy is shown here'

(e) *#And her(e) cortaysye_is kyd*
- xxSxxSxx

xxxSSxx

xxSxxxS

OV order keeps a monosyllabic pronoun out of final position in the variants like (22a). Auxiliary *is* follows its governed verbal participle in (22b). Here archaic order yields the highly valued 1/3/1 dip structure. The corresponding normal order in (22c) creates a 2/2/1 structure with lower frequency. VS order in (22d) seems to do more harm than good. Trisyllabic initial dips occur in only four hypermetrical a-verses, but there are twenty-eight instances with a trisyllabic medial dip. Emendation to (22e) would yield an ordinary type B variant with stress neutralization in the medial dip. Item (22d) can be attributed to the non-metrical preference for VS order after an adverb, which was strong enough to cause scribal errors.

9.12 Hypermetrical A-Verses with a Third Alliteration
on the Secondary Lift

In type Db, as we have seen, variants with a third alliteration on the secondary lift have a surprisingly high frequency of 38 percent (120/314). Frequency is even higher for hypermetrical a-verses: 67 percent (169/254). Table 9.8 shows the distribution of these a-verses in the corpus of limited ambiguity.

Table 9.8 *Distribution in the Smaller Corpus
of Hypermetrical A-Verses with Triple
Alliteration (64 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3	4
initial dip / medial dip ↓				
o/o		6	2	1
o/1	2	12	2	
o/2	1	1	1	
o/3	1			
1/o	1	8	5	1
1/1	1	8	5	
1/2		5		
2/1	1			
total	7	40	15	2

Table 9.9 *Distribution in the Larger Corpus of Hypermetrical A-Verses with Triple Alliteration (169 instances)*

final dip →	1	2	3	4
initial dip / medial dip ↓				
o/o		9	2	1
o/1	2	23	8	
o/2	5	1	2	
o/3	3	1		
o/4	1			
1/o	1	14	12	1
1/1	3	39	19	1
1/2	2	8		
1/3	2	1		
2/1	5		1	
3/1	2			
total	26	96	44	3

Table 9.10 *Comparison of Hypermetrical A-Verses with Double and Triple Alliteration*

Syllables in final dip	1	2	3	4	total
Double alliteration	53X	25X	7X		85
Frequency	62%	29%	8%		
Triple alliteration	26X	96X	44X	3X	169
Frequency	15%	57%	26%	2%	

Among hypermetrical a-verses with double alliteration (Table 9.7), the most common variant has a 1/3/1 dip structure and the variant with the next highest frequency has a o/3/1 structure. In Table 9.8, there is no instance of 1/3/1 and just one instance of o/3/1.

Table 9.9 provides counts for the larger corpus.

Contrasting frequencies for Table 9.7 and Table 9.9 are summarized in Table 9.10.

In variants with double alliteration, the final dip is usually short. In variants with triple alliteration, the final dip is usually long. In hypermetrical a-verses, as in comparable Db verses, an Old English technique of bounding an unusual dip with **alliteration**, employed originally between the first and second lift, has been extended to the dip between the second and third lift. Distinguishing hypermetrical a-verses rigorously from type Db verses in the larger corpus would require a major philological effort. Provisional scansions are adequate for our purposes. The most important metrical trends are common to both patterns and would show up with the same clarity in more precise scansions.

9.13 Archaic Word Order in Hypermetrical A-Verses with Triple Alliteration

Among the variants in [Table 9.9](#) are several with archaic placement of a finite verb.

- | | | |
|------|---|----------|
| (23) | (a) <i>Sere seggez hym sesed</i> (822a; cf. 1047a) | SxSxxsx |
| | ‘several men held him’ | |
| | (b) <i>Pat fele hit foyned wyth her fete</i> (428a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘so that many kicked it with their feet’ | |
| | (c) <i>Pat most myrpe myzt meue</i> (985a) | xSSxxsx |
| | ‘that might create the most merriment’ | |
| | (d) * <i>Pat myzt meue most myrpe</i> | xxSxSsx |
| | (e) <i>#And bihoues [> bos] his buffet abide</i> (1754a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘and must endure his blow’ | |
| | (f) <i>Fayre fylvolez pat fyzed</i> (796a) | SxSxxsx |
| | ‘that adjoined fair pinnacles’ | |
| | (g) <i>Wen[de] haf wylt of þe wode</i> (1711a) | SxSxxsx |
| | ‘would have wanted to go from the wood’ | |

OV order keeps monosyllabic pronouns out of verse-final position in the variants like (23a). In (23b), OV order avoids unusual length in the final dip. Item (23c) has a 1/o/2 arrangement of dips, attested fourteen times in [Table 9.9](#). With normal word order, (23c) would become (23d), a Da variant with a o/2/1 dip structure attested five times ([section 8.15](#)). If the poet originally employed the reduced form *bos*, (23e) would have the pattern of highest frequency on [Table 9.9](#). An unusual construction in (23f), employed elsewhere by the *Gawain* poet, places the object of the clause before the relative pronoun *pat*.¹² An infinitive appears before its governing main verb in (23g), creating a pattern attested twenty-three times. Placed after *wylt*, *wende* would create a 1/o/2 structure attested fourteen times.

Hypermetrical a-verses with triple alliteration include nine instances with VS syntax.

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (24) | (a) <i>Per wonez a wyȝe in þat waste</i> (2098a) | xSxxSxxsx |
| | ‘there dwells a knight in that wasteland’ | |
| | (b) <i>Ferly fayr(e) watz þe folde</i> (1694a; cf. 684a) | SxSxxsx |
| | ‘wondrously fair was the earth’ | |
| | (c) <i>For soþe, sir, quop þe segge</i> (1050a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | “‘In truth, sir,” said the knight’ | |
| | (d) <i>Twysse, worþy, quop þe wyȝe</i> (1276a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | “‘Indeed, noble (lady),” said the knight’ | |
| | (e) <i>Gawayn, quop þat grene gome</i> (2239a) | SxxxSxxs |
| | “‘Gawain,” said that green knight’ | |

A few variants like (24a) show routine inversion of subject and object after an adverb.¹³ In the variants like (24b), a predicate adjective phrase comes before the subject. Both these variants have the first alliteration on a semantically inessential adverb that improves the meter. Without *ferly*, (24b) would scan as SxxSx, a type A1 pattern characteristic of the b-verse. Items (24c–e) add semantically inessential *sir*, *worþy*, and *grene*, transforming common b-verse patterns into hypermetrical a-verses.

In item (25a–d), the poet employs archaic postpositions and pre-verbal adverbs.

- | | | |
|------|---|----------|
| (25) | (a) <i>He fonde a foo hym byfore</i> (716a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘he found a foe before him’ | |
| | (b) <i>A bende abelef hym aboute</i> (2517a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘a band slantwise about him’ | |
| | (c) <i>Aboute beten and bounden</i> (2028a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘trimmed and embroidered round about’ | |
| | (d) <i>Pe rich rurd þat þer watz raysed</i> (1916a) | xSSxxsx |
| | ‘the resounding noise that was raised there’ | |

In (25a–b), a postpositional phrase keeps *hym* out of final position. With the adverb in archaic position before the verb, (25c) has a highly valued dip structure, 1/1/2. If *aboute* were placed line-finally here, the dip structure would be 0/2/2, attested just once in Table 9.9, as compared with thirty-nine instances for 1/1/2. Moved to the end of (25d), *þer(e)* would acquire phrase-final stress, creating an unacceptable pattern with four lifts.

Archaic noun-adjective word order occurs in (26a–d).

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (26) | (a) <i>Hit wer(e) a folé felefolde</i> (1545a) | xxxSxSxxs |
| | ‘it would be a manifold folly’ | |
| | (b) <i>An oþer (= A noþer) noyse ful newe</i> (132a) | xSxSxxsx |
| | ‘another very new sound’ | |

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| (c) <i>Of bore okez ful hoge</i> (743a)
'of very huge gray oaks' | xSxSxxxSx |
| (d) <i>Pat apel Arthur(e) þe hende</i> (904a)
'that noble Arthur the courtly (presides over)' | xSxSxxxSx |

The secondary stress on *-folde* provides an ideal match for the secondary lift of (26a). Items (26b–d) add a semantically inessential phrase to what would otherwise scan as *xSxSx, a pattern unacceptable in either half of the line. Here as elsewhere *ful* and *þe* play important roles in formulaic composition.

9.14 Possible Substitutions of French for English in Anomalous Heavy Verses

Item (27a), a Db variant with single alliteration, might have resulted from substitution of a French phrase for its English equivalent.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| (27) (a) <i>And Agrauayn a la dure mayn</i> (110a)
'And Agravaïn of the hard hand' | |
| (b) <i>#And Agrauayn of þe harde hand</i> | xSxxxxSxs |
| (c) <i>Bertilak de Hautdesert</i> (2445a) | |
| (d) <i>#Bertilak of þe Hyze Heþ</i>
'Bertilak of the High Heath' | xxxxxSxS |
| (e) <i>Sir Doddinaual de Sauage</i> (552a)
'Sir Dodinel of the wild (forest?)' | |
| (f) <i>#Sir Doddinaual þe doȝty</i> | xSxxxxSx |

When translated into Middle English, (27a) becomes (27b), an acceptable Db variant.¹⁴ Here the scribe may be responding to the prestige of French in English manuscript culture (section 4.13). A similar translation from French to English transforms (27c) into (27d), a type B variant with an ultralong initial dip.¹⁵ In (27e), lack of the required second alliteration makes it impossible to determine the appropriate scansion for *Sauage*. *Doddinaual* is "properly *Dodinal* or *Dodinel li Sauvage*, 'the wild,' (so called, according to the Vulgate *Merlin*, because he liked hunting in wild forests)."¹⁶ The epithet in (27f) seems appropriate for this character and the emended verse scans as type A1 with an ultralong medial dip. The alliterating word in the b-verse of line 552 is *duk* 'duke.' Compare C 1182, where *duk* alliterates with *doȝty*.

9.15 Summary for Chapters 3–9

Overview of Evolutionary Developments

The a-verse was the preferred location for Old English type Da, type Db, the A2 subtype Sx/Ss, and heavy hypermetrical types with three lifts.

In these types, complexity was reduced when the last two stresses were realized in a single word. Due to the low frequency of Old English words with the pattern Sxxs, the *Beowulf* poet usually had to realize the corresponding foot as a word group in long type Db. What could be done in this subtype was to maximize use of word groups that mimicked compound structure. Sx:x-s groups provided effective substitutes for Sxxs compounds.

The surviving heavy types were restricted to the a-verse in SGGK. All of them had two primary lifts followed by a secondary lift. The secondary lift, which alliterated optionally, was clearly subordinate to the primary lifts, which alliterated obligatorily. It was still desirable to realize the last two stresses of a heavy verse in a single word, matching subordinate linguistic stress to the subordinate final lift. Although compounds were harder to find for heavy verses, native forms with stressed suffixes were still available and anglicized French borrowings provided words with similar stress patterns. Sxxs words were very difficult to obtain for Middle English long type Db. The *Gawain* poet constructed substitutes with Sxxs phrases ending in a prefixed monosyllable, adapting the *Beowulf* poet's technique to a new linguistic environment. Although syntactic rules for division of heavy verses were no longer strictly enforced, the major syntactic break normally divided Middle English type Db into two coherent metrical domains with a primary lift in each domain. This syntactic division supported the new metrical constant of two primary lifts.

Indispensable function words demanded more room in all Middle English verse types, putting pressure on the final dip of type Db, which had been limited to two metrical syllables in Old English poetry. The *Gawain* poet sometimes employed longer final dips in this verse type but took special pains to demarcate them with alliteration at both ends, generalizing a strategy employed for long medial dips in *Beowulf*. The same strategy was used for hypermetrical a-verses with a long final dip.

In Old English types A2 and D, rules based on compound stress often required a second alliterating syllable to mark the leftward boundary of the second foot. This requirement could be satisfied only in the a-verse. Even after word-foot principles had been lost, heavy types could be identified as characteristic of the a-verse. In *Beowulf*, the only types with a secondary lift between primary lifts were type E, type A2a, and a rare A2 subtype with four lifts. Unsustainable restrictions on unstressed function words doomed these types to extinction. After they died out, the first two

lifts were primary in all surviving heavy types. In this respect as in others the Middle English heavy types form a coherent group.

Types B and C form a second coherent group. In the Old English system their light first foot had the pattern x or xx and their second foot was realized most directly as a word with two stresses. To highlight the metrical constant of two word feet, the *Beowulf* poet took pains to achieve an adequate frequency of B and C variants with the second foot realized as a single word. Since two-word realizations of types B and C were light relative to a strong verse-level norm, they were perceived as complex and were routed selectively to the opening half of the line. Variants with a word group in the second foot adhered to the verse-level weight norm and were routed selectively to the b-verse despite their more complex foot structure.

When the productivity of compounding declined and word-foot structure was obscured, a verse-final compound had no obvious metrical importance in types B and C. Variants with the second foot occupied by a word group increased in frequency and were eventually perceived as optimal. At that point the secondary lifts in types B and C were no longer recognizable as subordinate and were perceived as primary lifts. All surviving verse types then had two primary lifts and a new metrical constant had evolved, replacing the old constant of two word feet.

A last group consists of type A₁ and the hypermetrical b-verse. These types favored words with the high-frequency trochaic pattern and were readily adapted to proliferation of function words. Due to its inherent simplicity, Old English type A₁ had always been tolerant of extrametrical syllables. Syllable count had never been restricted in the initial dip of hypermetrical b-verses.

Within the evolving b-verse, types with trochaic closure eventually predominated. These were type A₁, type C, and the most common hypermetrical b-verse pattern. Type B became increasingly anomalous in the b-verse and a shift to the a-verse, already perceptible in *Maldon*, continued to completion. Resistance to this shift was minimal because B variants with a word group in the second foot had always been acceptable in the a-verse, especially those ending with a prominently stressed noun or adjective. As unsustainable rules were lost, metrical coherence demanded new rules to replace them and the principle of asymmetry was an obvious candidate. Heavy types that never had high frequency in the b-verse were restricted to the a-verse. With a handful of possible exceptions, a-verses of type C were shifted to their usual location in the b-verse. The shift of type A₁ to the b-verse, already conspicuous in *Maldon*, went through nearly to

completion, leaving behind a **variant** with two long dips that had always been restricted to the a-verse.

As the **principle of asymmetry** gained power, a demand for contrast overcame some Old English limits on dip size, but only in the opening half of the **line**, where metrical **complexity** was most tolerable. Traditional poets worked hard to maintain their verse-making technology, preserving traditional tendencies that were still observable. In the b-verse, a regularized long dip was situated in the most tolerant Old English locations: the medial dip of type A1, the initial dip of type C, and the initial dip of the hypermetrical b-verse.

Scribal Intervention in Alliterative Lines

A scribe had frequent opportunities to bring SGGK closer to the literary mainstream. Dialectal forms and poetic archaisms could be replaced with more familiar or prestigious forms. Semantically inessential words could simply be omitted. In the a-verse, these procedures often removed one alliterating word, creating **lines** that were metrically non-traditional but retained an **alliterative** linkage to the b-verse.¹⁷ Scribes also replaced archaic word order with more **idiomatic** order. This procedure created an inferior metrical pattern but allowed for retention of all alliterating words. A scribe could carry out such procedures opportunistically at a reasonable pace of transcription. Where scribal alteration seems likely, the result is often fluent, with no signs of confusion about meaning. The scribe may have operated somewhat like a literary translator, preserving as much of the metrical form as possible while catering to the needs and tastes of readers.

We can detect scribal alterations because the anomalies they create are avoided elsewhere by a **formulaic** technique. Consider the scribe's version of 1942a, *'Mary,' quop þat oþer mon*, which has the anomalous pattern SxxxxxS. This anomaly could be avoided with the archaic word order *mon oþer*, paralleled in 2342b, or by replacing *oþer mon* with *menskful* 'distinguished,' as in 555a, where the adjective is used in archaic fashion as an epithet meaning 'distinguished person' and also happens to alliterate with *Mary*. Neither emendation should be forced on an editor, but the fact that two such emendations are plausible shows that the line has no value for a metrical theory.¹⁸ There is no reason to think that the poet would allow a metrical anomaly to stand. Even illiterate poets can detect metrical faults in a small fraction of a second and they scold pupils

instantly when such faults occur.¹⁹ Competent formulaic poets *internalize* metrical rules in a way that produces consistent results.

In *Chapters 5–9* I have proposed remedies for all unmetrical verses not emended, to my knowledge, in previous scholarship, except for ten remainders. Uncertainty about fine points of alliteration makes it difficult to decide whether emendation is necessary in 1742a and 2011a. The other remainders can be set aside without discussion because they are so obviously unmetrical.²⁰

The Birth of English Iambic Meter

10.1 Metrical Death

The English alliterative tradition went into decline after the fourteenth century. By the end of the sixteenth century, poems in strict alliterative meter “lay neglected in manuscripts, and vanished for a long time from the literary scene.”¹ The cause of metrical death can be ascertained. When Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope were writing, the option of counting archaic final *-e* as syllabic had been lost altogether.² In the early Modern English era, weak final *-e* became a silent letter indicating *tenseness* in a preceding stressed vowel. In *rot*, for example, the vowel spelled < o > is lax; in *rote* the < o > is tense and the < e > is silent. In some words Chaucer could disregard final *-e* or assign it to a *metrical position* as required.³ When weak final *-e* lost its syllabic potential, Chaucer’s metrical technique became incomprehensible. Before linguists recovered this technique, “many of Chaucer’s most enthusiastic admirers among English poets and critics have regarded his meter as irregular and rough.”⁴ The meter of SGGK would seem even rougher by the seventeenth century. Many lines would appear to end with a stressed monosyllable and long dips would often appear to be short. Rules for the b-verse would be impossible to learn by intuition and it would be impossible to appreciate the principles of contrast that define the a-verse.

Chaucer wrote within the cultural mainstream, close to the center of power in the public sphere. Iambic pentameter retained prestige through the transition to Modern English, adapting to loss of final *-e* and of some final syllables that ended in a consonant, for example *-ed*, the past-tense marker for regular verbs. This is now usually non-syllabic [d], as in *failed*, or [t], as in *stopped*, but survives as syllabic to break up an unpronounceable [td] or [dd], as in *boasted* and *loaded*. Iambic pentameter employed a single *line* pattern composed of five identical feet. In contrast to alliterative verse types, which alternated unpredictably, the iambic pattern could be apprehended even when *simplex* words crossed the *foot* boundary. Words that remained trochaic in Modern

English were no longer favored in the new form but the **mismatches** they created were manageable (section 1.17). What the new meter showcased were prestigious iambic borrowings from French and Latin, words like *reply* and *obscure*. The iambic **foot** also provided an ideal site for the native iambic phrases that proliferated as inflectional endings were replaced by **function words** such as articles, auxiliary verbs, and prepositions. Consider *Beowulf* 1507a, *hrínga / þéngel*, a highly valued realization of type A1 with two trochaic words. This translates as *the lord / of rings*, with two iambic word groups. Though abstracted from borrowed words with the most common French pattern, the **iamb** was suitable for colloquial English as well. Iambic meter was a viable compromise between the native base language and imported words that achieved high frequency in literary English.⁵

The shift from SOV to SVO broke the link between traditional **alliterative** patterns and optimal patterns of stress within phrases and sentences. The typical iambic pentameter **line** was realized as an SVO sentence or clause with the most prominent **phrasal stress** on the last word – the most suitable location for a **sound echo** in Modern English. Since alliterative meter requires **word stress** in a fixed location (section 2.6), **alliteration** became less and less suitable as English borrowed words with non-initial stress. The radically anglicized forms required for alliterative meter must have seemed odd or rustic to sophisticated Londoners in Chaucer's milieu. To appreciate this sociolinguistic effect, try to imagine Tennyson rhyming *carriage* with an anglicized pronunciation of *garage*. The canonical **rhyme** rule, on the other hand, is perfectly adapted to prestige Romance borrowings (section 1.10).

10.2 The Bob and Wheel

Working indirectly through characters, Chaucer distances himself from more northerly practitioners of English literature, as when the learned Parson declares he is a Southerner and cannot compose in the native English form, “rum, ram, ruf,’ by lettre.”⁶ *Sir Thopas* adds a scathing parody of northern rhymed verse with its characteristic “bob and wheel.” Chaucer shows thinly veiled contempt for anglicized French in remarks about the Prioress, who speaks the language in accord with her parochial schooling and has never encountered the French of Paris.⁷ SGGK takes exactly the opposite social stance. The poet distances himself from the center of power, working through characters in a remarkably isolated castle to the north, situated deep in the Wilderness of Wirral. The inhabitants of this castle claim to be ignorant country folk but turn out to be very keen-witted and as socially adept as Gawain, the representative of knightly *savoir faire*. The implied

audience of SGGK could still understand alliterative tradition but could also appreciate French culture and iambic meters.

Lines 227–31 of SGGK provide a representative example of the bob and wheel. I include the last line of the alliterative passage to illustrate the transition between meters.

- (1) “Se þat segg[e] in syȝt and with hymself speke
raysoun.”

To knyȝtes he kest his yȝe
And reled hym up and down;
He stemmed, and con studie
Quo walt þer most renoun.

“ . . . to see that man with my own eyes and speak sense with him.” He cast his eyes on the knights and rolled them up and down. He paused and began to ponder who there had most renown.

Item (1) illustrates features of the bob and wheel that are carried through consistently in SGGK. The bob, *raysoun*, is printed as a short line. It rhymes with lines 2 and 4 of the wheel. Although it initiates the rhymed portion of the stanza, the bob is included in the last clause of the alliterative passage. Transition from one meter to the other is dramatic. The verb *speak* is usually intransitive, in Middle English as in Modern English. Its direct object *raysoun* comes as a surprise, intruding just after the apparent end of a b-verse clause and ending that clause with a French iamb rather than a Germanic *trochee*. In *Sir Thopas*, Chaucer parodies the bob and wheel with some facility but his grasp of its technique seems limited. One of his five bobs, *Thy mawe* (Fragment VII, line 823), stands at the beginning of a new sentence continued in the wheel. There is no such bob among the 101 instances in SGGK.

10.3 Unstressed Syllables at the Margins of the Line

In Chaucer’s iambic meters, an *extrametrical* unstressed syllable may be added at line end.⁸ The same option is available in the rhymed passages of SGGK. In iambic tradition, this option is linked to its converse: omission of an unstressed syllable at the beginning of a “*headless*” line.⁹

- (2) (a) *Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed* (General Prologue, 294)
‘twenty books bound in black or red’
(b) *Soth moȝt no mon say* (G 84)
‘in truth no man could say’

In (2a), Chaucer realizes his iambic pentameter line as S/xS/xS/xS/xS. In (2b), the *Gawain* poet realizes his iambic trimeter line as S/xS/xS.

There are, however, no **headless** bobs. At the beginning of a rhymed passage, when establishment of the new rhythm is essential, a rising stress contour is obligatory. Exclusion of headless bobs falls under the **universal introductory principle** (section 1.11).

The lines of the wheel obey a less strict form of the requirement in the bob. Only 30 of 404 instances are headless. Beside the 30 headless lines we can set at least 129 without an unstressed syllable at line end (not counting many likely instances involving words with weak final *-e*). In the bob and wheel, final unstressed syllables have conspicuously lower frequency than unstressed syllables at the beginning of the line. The alliterative b-verse shows, of course, that the poet had great facility with line-final placement of unstressed syllables when that was metrically desirable.

10.4 Word-**Foot** Structure in the Bob and Wheel

The wheel permits dips of two and occasionally three **metrical syllables** between S positions. Though less strict in this regard than iambic pentameter, the wheel does not allow long dips to occur freely. These dips are carefully managed departures from an iambic trimeter norm (xS/xS/xS). The slashes indicate that the wheel employs **iambic** word feet, as several kinds of evidence make clear.¹⁰

Setting aside for the moment the proper name *Gawain*, we find twenty-two iambic words at the end of the trimeter line, as for example in item (3a).¹¹ The metrical value of these words is confirmed by rhyme on the final syllable.

- (3) (a) *Bicause of your sembláunt* (1843)
'because of your behavior'
- (b) *Azáyñ his dintez sore* (2116; cf. 1948)
'against his grievous blows'
- (c) *He blenched azáyñ bilyue* (1715)
'he swerved again quickly'
- (d) *A méruayl among þo men(ne)* (466)
'a marvel among the men'
- (e) *And sayd, "Sir cōrtays knyȝt* (276; cf. 148)
'and said, "Worthy courteous knight'
- (f) *Set in his sémblaunt sene* (148)
'marked clearly in his appearance'
- (g) *Bi þat his resounz were redde* (443)
'by the time his words had been spoken'

Words that scan as iambic appear twice in initial position (3b) and perhaps twice in medial position. In both **variants** like (3b), the iambic word is Middle English *azayn*, from Old English *ongean*, a native prefixed form.

In item (3c), the iambic word in medial position is also *azáyn*. In (3d), anglicized scansion of *meruayl* as trochaic yields a highly favored xS opening for the line. Interpretation of *meruayl* as iambic would create an xS opening with much lower frequency (see Table 10.1 for the distribution of dips in the bob and wheel). Alliteration of *mervayl* with *men* provides independent evidence for trochaic value in this case. Alliteration also points toward trochaic scansion for the disyllables in (3e–f), and this preferred scansion yields a common variant with a single unstressed syllable before the final lift. Iambic scansion of *cortays* or *semblaunt* would create an otherwise unattested pattern with clashing stress. Alliteration points toward trochaic value for *resounz* in (3g), but iambic scansion yields a somewhat more common rhythmical pattern. However we decide such cases, the proportion of twenty-two iambic words in final position to three or four in non-final position makes it clear that the iambic word was perceived as the optimal realization of the iambic foot and was attracted to the end of the line by the principle of closure. As Solopova observes, “Coincidence of metrical feet and word boundaries is avoided in modern English verse, and when it does occur the effect is likely to be monotonous.”¹² There is no such risk of monotony in the *Gawain* poet’s iambic lines because their dips are of varying length and their stressed syllables occur in unpredictable locations. Stricter alignment of words with feet compensates for these freedoms.¹³

The proper name *Gawain* appears six times in final position and fifteen times non-finally. It scans as trochaic in ten of the non-final instances.¹⁴ This distribution suggests that the anglicized form of *Gawain* was perceived as normal by the poet, in accord with the principle that use of a word to designate an individual renders its original meaning largely irrelevant and obscures its etymology. As a protagonist’s name with high frequency, *Gawain* follows rules of its own, like the protagonist’s name in *Beowulf*.¹⁵

Like iambic xS words, xSx words with weak final *-e* are attracted to the end of the line.

- (4) (a) *He brayd(e) his bluk abóute* (440)
 ‘he twisted his body about’
 (b) *Bitwéne two so dyngne dame* (1316)
 ‘between two such worthy women’
 (c) *Gret peril(e) bitwéne hem stode* (1768; cf. 300)
 ‘great peril stood between them’

Item (4a) is one of thirty-eight lines that end with such an xSx word.¹⁶ Initial placement occurs in four lines like (4b).¹⁷ Medial placement occurs in a pair of lines like (4c). The similarity between this distribution and the

distribution of xS words suggests that xSx words with weak final *-e* normally had iambic metrical value in the rhymed lines. There are no lines in which the final *-e* of an xSx word provides the only occupant for a mandatory dip. In first or second position, such an xSx word is always followed by a word that can fill the dip by itself, for example *hem* in (4c).

When they end with a consonant, xSx words are not strongly attracted to final position and their final syllable sometimes provides the only occupant for a mandatory dip.¹⁸ Items (5a–c) illustrate placement of these xSx words finally, initially, and medially.

- (5) (a) *Pe wallez were wel aráyed* (783)
'the walls were well constructed'
- (b) *Recórded couenauntes ofí(e)* (1123)
'often mentioned (their) agreements'
- (c) *Be prynce withóuten pere* (873; cf. 127 and 992)
'be (a) prince without peer'

Forms like *aráyed*, *recórded*, and *withóuten* appear line-finally in six of seventeen instances (35 percent), as compared with thirty-eight of forty-four instances for xSx words with final *-e* (86 percent). In the variants like (5c), the final syllable of the xSx word provides the only occupant for a mandatory dip before the third S position.

The principles governing placement of iambic words apply with opposite effect to trochaic words, which disrupt iambic rhythm. This type of disruption is carefully managed.

- (6) (a) *þat nyȝt* (990)
'that night'
- (b) *in halle* (102)
'in (the) hall'
- (c) *bot slokes!* (412; cf. 1015 and 2425)
'but wait!'
- (d) *resóun* (227; cf. 174, 296, and 2526)
'sensible speech'
- (e) *nowhare* (2254; cf. 735 and 2279)
'in no case'

The vast majority of bobs end in a stressed monosyllable, like (6a), or in a trochaic word with final *-e*, like (6b). Trochaic words with a final consonant appear in three bobs like (6c), as compared with twenty-five bobs like (6a) and seventy-one bobs like (6b). Four bobs like (6d) are realized as a single iambic word. All bobs realized as xSx words end with final *-e*, like (6e).

In the wheel, the final position preferred for iambic words is strongly *dispreferred* for trochaic words ending in a consonant.

- (7) (a) *Wyth lÿppez smal lazande* (1207)
 ‘laughing with little lips’
 (b) *And rys, and rÿkeze þenne* (1076)
 ‘and rise and depart then’
 (c) *Bot on stroke here me fállez* (2327)
 ‘only one stroke falls to my lot’

Trochaic words ending in a consonant occupy initial position in 108 lines like (7a), medial position in 48 lines like (7b), and final position in 20 lines like (7c). The steady decline in frequency toward the end of the line highlights the enhanced frequency of iambic words drawn to that location by the principle of closure.

Trochaic words with final *-e* favor the end of the line.

- (8) (a) *A stéde ful stif to strayn(e)* (176)
 ‘a horse very hard to control’
 (b) *And oft boþ(e) blysse and blunder* (18)
 ‘and often both joy and trouble’
 (c) *And I schal erly rÿse* (1101)
 ‘and I shall rise early’
 (d) *Now grayþed is Gawan gáý* (666)
 ‘now fair Gawain is arrayed’

Words like *stéde*, *blisse*, and *rÿse* occupy initial position in 75 lines like (8a), medial position in 80 lines like (8b), and final position in 217 lines like (8c). Such words are clearly distinguished from the unambiguously trochaic words that disrupt iambic meter. Trochaic words with final *-e* have a distribution similar to that of stressed words spelled as monosyllables by Putter and Stokes, which appear twenty-four times in initial position, thirty-nine times in medial position, and fifty-one times in final position. Item (8d) shows the preferred location for such S words in the wheel.

The large sample of words spelled as trochaic provides a few instances in which weak final *-e* provides the only possible occupant for a mandatory dip.

- (9) (a) *With léll[e] lett(e)/res loken* (35)
 ‘fastened with precise letters’
 (b) *Bi þat / on þryn/ne syþe* (1868)
 ‘by then on three occasions’

There are four instances like (9a), with weak *-e* in the dip before S2, and five like (9b), with weak *-e* in the dip before S3.¹⁹ In rhyming lines, scansion as Sx was evidently possible for forms like the plural adjective *léle*. This metrical usage is far less conspicuous than in the alliterative lines, where a non-final stressed word normally has the added prominence of a sound echo.

In Chaucer's iambic verse, final *-e* is often unrealized in non-rhyming words, even in nouns and adjectives with prominent word stress. Final *-e* restricted possibilities of rhyming in the line-final word of Chaucer's line, which had prominent phrasal stress in addition to its metrical **prominence**. This line-final *-e* had no apparent rhythmical value, however.²⁰ As we have seen, statistics for word placement in the bob and wheel show that xSx words with final *-e* were interpreted as iambic and routed selectively to the end of the line. Line-final *-e* seems to lack rhythmical value in the *Gawain* poet's rhymed lines as well.

Realization of final *-e* depends in part on the predominant rhythm of the line. In the alliterative line, with its archaic falling rhythm, a realized final *-e* typically coincides with rhythmical expectations. In the bob and wheel, with its well-delineated iambs, the falling word rhythm created by final *-e* typically conflicts with **foot** structure. When confronted with ambiguous linguistic material, it seems, the audience hears what it expects to hear.

10.5 Unstressed Syllables on S Positions in the Wheel

The *Gawain* poet's trimeters allow for realization of a non-final iambic foot as xx. A similar stress **mismatch** occurs in the **pyrrhic foot** of iambic pentameter.²¹

- (10) (a) *As hit / is stād / and stóken* (33)
 'as it is placed and embedded'
 (b) *Þat ho / ne con mákle fūl táme* (2455)
 'that she cannot make quite tame'
 (c) *So sáyð / al þat / hym sýðe* (200)
 'so said all that saw him'
 (d) *To chám / bre he con / hym cälle* (1666)
 'he (Bertilak) began to call him (Gawain) to the chamber'
 (e) *I con / not hit / restóre* (2283; cf. 2117 and 2136)
 'I cannot restore it'

In trimeters with a stressed syllable on each **S position**, the dips between S positions are always filled. The dip before S₁ can be empty in headless lines, but this option is not available for the dips before S₂ and S₃. Though not always filled, the dip before S₁ is normally filled, so a preferred scansion can be identified for (10a), (10c), and (10e). The first six syllables in these lines correspond one-to-one with metrical positions and the last syllable is extrametrical. Statistics in **Table 10.1** make it clear how to scan more complex examples. Since long dips are rare before S₁ and quite common before S₂, S₁ is most plausibly occupied by *ho* rather than by *ne* in (10b). In (10d), placing the extra syllable in the more tolerant medial dip puts *con*

rather than *he* on S2. Such scansion also put the more prominent function word on the S position if we use the criteria for alliterative poetry (section 4.2). By these criteria, pronouns like *ho* are more prominent than negative particles like *ne* and auxiliaries like *con* are more prominent than pronouns like *he*.

10.6 Stressed Syllables on x Positions in the Wheel

A syllable with significant stress sometimes occupies an x position in iambic pentameter, typically when the following syllable has stronger stress (section 1.17). The *Gawain* poet employs similar mismatches.

- (11) (a) *Grèt rúrd / in þat / forest* (1149)
 ‘great noise in that forest’
 (b) *Þe burn(e) / bēde brýng / his blonk* (2024)
 ‘the man said to bring his horse’
 (c) *Þe knyȝt / màð áy / gòð chére* (562)
 ‘the knight always made good cheer’

A stressed syllable can occupy the first dip, as in (11a), the second dip, as in (11b–c), or the third dip, as in (11c). In these cases the syllable on the x position is less prominent than the syllable on the S position and the foot has iambic rhythm despite the mismatch. Realizations like *grèt rúrd* are common in English iambic tradition. Compare *gròss lóut* in Shakespeare’s poetry (section 1.17, item (14c)). In the strictly governed bob there are no comparable instances of stress on initial x. The only imaginable instances of stress involve *all* (1X) and *full* (5X), high-frequency intensifiers that normally occupy a dip in alliterative lines. The first foot of the trimeter is governed almost as strictly as the bob. In the vast majority of instances, the dip before S1 is filled by an unstressed prefix or a function word from a closed class such as a pronoun, article, conjunction, auxiliary, or preposition. Most of the remaining instances begin with vague intensifiers like *ful* (15X), *gret* (2X), *good* (line 129), *more* (line 968), *much* (5X), and *mony* (3X). Line-initial quantifiers with intensifying function include *all* (2X) and *aye* ‘every’ (line 128). High-frequency adverbs include *here* (2X) and *now* (2X). Quasi-auxiliaries include *dar* (line 300) and *letes* (line 2387). Just slightly more prominent is the high-frequency control verb *ta* ‘take’ (line 413), which comes into English from Norse. Compare Old English *niman*, with the same meaning, which can occupy the dip (section 4.11).

Open-class words attested more than twice before S1 include *sir* (3X) and *quoþ* (3X). These have extremely high frequency in SGGK and normally occupy the dip in alliterative lines. At the beginning of line 57, *king* appears

as a lexically presupposed noun with pronominal function. *King* has high frequency in SGGK and appears in the well-defined dip of the b-verse.²² Line 838 begins with the casual interjection *grant mercy*. In alliterative lines, this phrase alliterates on [g].²³ The implied pronunciation in the rhymed line probably had phrase-final stress on *mercy*, however. The remaining two instances are more difficult to analyze, but in these too the line-initial stress was probably weaker than the stress on S1.²⁴

In the tolerant medial dip before S2, the *Gawain* poet employs some complex rhythmical effects of canonical iambic pentameter.

- (12) (a) *Resemb/ling stròng / yóuth in / his mid/dle age* (Son. 7.6)
 (b) *With silk / sáynt[ɪ] vmb(e) / his syde* (G 589)
 'with silk girdle around his waist'
 (c) *Scho mad/le_hym sò / grét chere* (G 1259)
 'she provided such good entertainment for him'

In (12a), Shakespeare positions an adjective-noun construction with the more prominent noun *youth* on an x position and the unstressed preposition *in* on the following S position.²⁵ In (12b), the *Gawain* poet positions *silk sáynt* in the same way, with unstressed *vmb* on S2.²⁶ The sharply falling trochaic pattern of *sáynt vmb* cannot be duplicated in the last foot of the trimeter. Unlike S1 and S2, which can be occupied by an unstressed syllable, S3 must be occupied by a syllable with sufficient prominence for rhyme. We do find variants like (12c), where the more prominently stressed constituent of a two-word phrase occupies the dip before S3.²⁷ The syllable on S3 in these variants has greater prominence than the stressed syllable in the preceding dip.

Employment of an Sx word in the first iambic foot, the so-called "trochaic inversion," is quite common in iambic pentameter.²⁸

- (13) (a) *Rédy / to wend/en on / my pil/grimag/le* (General Prologue 21)
 'ready to depart on my pilgrimage'
 (b) *The blod / in his fac/le con mell/le* (G 2503)
 'the blood began to flow into his face'
 (c) *Rách-lez that ran / on rac-le* (G 1420)
 'marked clearly in his appearance'
 (d) *For[-]wónd-ler of his hú-le men had-le* (G 147)
 'people experienced great wonder at his color'

Chaucer fills the first iambic foot with trochaic *rédy* in (13a). Apart from well-studied kinds of prosodic ambiguity like elision, Chaucer's line requires assignment of each linguistic syllable to its own metrical position. Item (13a) cannot be scanned as *headless* because that would place two non-elidable syllables on the second x position (-y to). In the trimeters of SGGK, on the

other hand, the tolerant second dip is often filled with an unambiguous xx sequence, as in (13b). Though it has the same opening stress contour as Chaucer's (13a), the *Gawain* poet's (13c) scans most plausibly as a headless line with a long medial dip. A trimeter with an initial stressed syllable followed by three unstressed syllables might imaginably be analyzed as a trochaic inversion followed by a disyllabic long dip. All lines with three unstressed syllables after the first stress have a verse-initial unstressed syllable, however, as with (13d).²⁹ In such lines the poet makes it clear that the first stress is aligned with S₁ and that all three following syllables occupy the dip before S₂. Given the crucial role of the introductory principle in the bob and wheel, the lack of evidence for **trochaic inversion** comes as no surprise.

10.7 Distribution of Dips in the Bob and Wheel

Table 10.1 shows the number of instances for dips of a given length before the S position of the bob and before each of the S positions in the trimeter. For dips with a given number of syllables there are three separate counts. The first count specifies the number of instances that are unambiguous or very nearly so. The second count specifies the number of instances obtained by contraction, **elision** of final *-e*, or deletion of one weak *e* when another weak *e* appears in an adjacent syllable. The third count specifies the number of instances obtained by deleting a non-reducible instance of weak *-e*. Percentages refer to totals at the bottom of each column.

Table 10.1 *Dips in the Bob and Wheel*

number of syllables	bob-initial	before S ₁	before S ₂	before S ₃
empty	none	28 (7%)	none	none
one	98 (97%)	328 (80%)	196 (49%)	271 (67%)
reduces to one	n/a	n/a	31 (8%)	38 (9%)
one without <i>-e</i>	1 (1%)	11 (3%)	40 (10%)	57 (14%)
two	2 (2%)	37 (9%)	107 (26%)	33 (8%)
reduces to two	n/a	n/a	9 (2%)	1 (<1%)
two without <i>-e</i>	none	none	12 (2%)	4 (1%)
three	none	none	8 (2%)	none
reduces to three	none	none	1 (< 1%)	none
total	101	404	404	404

The one-syllable norm is enforced most strongly in the bob, at the point of rhythmic transition. Enforcement is quite strong before S₁ and S₃ in the wheel. In the more tolerant medial dip (before S₂), less than half of the dips are realized as unambiguous x and irreducible dips with three syllables appear. The wheel is a short form employing a line with a rhythm contrary to the dominant rhythm of the poem. To create iambic movement, the poet concentrates departures from the xS norm in the middle of the line. The bob and wheel may have employed additional kinds of reduction used in later iambic poetry.³⁰ If so, the number of long dips would be reduced overall but the distribution of dips would show the same tendencies. A verse pattern achieved by reduction is more complex than the same pattern with one-to-one correspondence of syllables to metrical positions. However we choose to scan, the more complex character of the medial dip will stand out.

10.8 Summary

Loss of underlying weak *-e* began in fluent speech as a **postlexical** sound change. By Shakespeare's time, final *-e* had also been lost at the **lexical level** and was no longer present in **underlying forms**. The archaic values required for intuitive scansion were no longer recoverable and the alliterative tradition came to an end. Alliterative meters required radically anglicized forms of borrowed words and received little respect from a literary establishment dominated by French and Latin works. Iambic pentameter showcased prestige forms of French borrowings as well as native English phrases with a **function word** followed by a stressed monosyllable. These native iambic phrases were apprehended as word-like. In Shakespeare's sonnets, they obeyed slightly weaker forms of rules for placement of iambic words (**section 1.17**).

Though less common than in early Middle English, trochaic words are still very common. Excluding them from iambic lines would have been unthinkable awkward. Trochaic words required artful management because their word-foot rhythm opposed the iambic norm. Chaucer maintained iambic rhythm by one-to-one matching of syllables with **metrical positions**. Strict regulation of syllable count clarified the basic metrical pattern and isolated permissible departures as options that were easy to learn. Iambic rhythm was maintained differently in the rhymed lines of SGGK. Drawing on the **principle of closure**, a **universal** expectation of increasing strictness toward the end of any metrical unit, the *Gawain* poet placed iambic words with conspicuous frequency at the end of the

line and placed trochaic words toward the beginning of the line with equally conspicuous frequency. There could be no doubt about which word pattern provided the linguistic basis for the metrical foot.

The **introductory principle** assumed special importance in a poem that shifted abruptly from the falling rhythm of alliterative lines to the rising rhythm of rhymed lines. Mandatory rising rhythm in the bob, at the point of metrical transition, introduced the iambic rhythm emphatically. Semantically inessential words that eked out long dips in alliterative verses created iambic rhythm in the trimeters. Selective word placement made it unnecessary to impose strict constraints on syllable count. Long dips were managed with care, however. They occurred most often in the tolerant medial dip of the trimeter, which was not influenced by the introductory principle or the **principle of closure**. The middle of the line accumulated aesthetic tension for release in the closure, like the dominant seventh chord in Western harmony (section 1.12)

As the gap widened between English and a meter based on proto-Germanic norms, alliterative poetry presented an audience more and more often with archaic grammatical constructions, obsolete words, and implied pronunciations that no longer occurred in fluent speech. These artifices would have added to the effort of intuitive scansion. The new iambic meter employed archaic language much less often. Instances of archaic *-e* that had to be identified in alliterative lines could safely be ignored in most rhymed lines. Transition from **alliteration** to **rhyme** in SGGK would have been perceived as a sharp decrease in **complexity**.

Rhymed lines typically summarize the action of the preceding alliterative passage. Editors accordingly format the bob and wheel as the closing portion of a two-part stanza. Given the more **idiomatic** character of the rhymed lines, the *Gawain* poet's ordering of parts is the only one consistent with the **principle of closure**. In the fourteenth century, a shift from alliteration to rhyme was also a shift from tension to release.

General Summary

II.1 Advantages of a Language-Based Theory of Meter

Studies of poetic form in Western scholarship have focused on iambic pentameter, the meter of Shakespeare, and dactylic hexameter, the meter of Homer. The *lines* employed by these poets are sometimes represented as syllabic patterns with no internal boundaries (section 1.19). On this approach, iambic pentameter might be notated as xSxSxSxSxS and dactylic hexameter as SxxSxxSxxSxxSxxSS, where x represents a less prominent syllable and S represents a more prominent syllable. These syllable-based scansions fail as descriptions of what Shakespeare and Homer actually do. Homer often substitutes a long syllable for two short syllables. Shakespeare will substitute an unstressed syllable for any stressed syllable but the rhyming one. Within stricter limits, Shakespeare substitutes stressed syllables for unstressed syllables and exceeds the number of syllables in the basic pattern. If syllabic notations have any value, they must represent ideals of form that particular verses approach to varying degrees.

Music theory, the most highly developed science of aesthetic form, explains how the sense of a fixed rhythm can be maintained despite departures from the norm. Jazz syncopation places accented notes in unusual positions while maintaining 4/4 time. Shakespeare can place prominent syllables on weak metrical positions without disrupting his iambic norm (section 1.17). Skilled poets and musicians keep departures from norms within limits, avoiding some patterns altogether and restricting the frequency of others. Like a musical time signature, an idealized metrical pattern can provide a standard against which rhythms are measured.

At a certain point, syllabic notations prove inadequate even as ideals. Problems begin with the discovery that iambic *foot* boundaries normally correspond to word boundaries, which are not realized predictably as pauses in connected speech (section 1.16). A listener who speaks the poet's language

can identify such boundaries instantly. They pose no problems for intuitive scansion. They are not well-defined acoustic entities, however, and they are not at all like syllables. The boundaries of a poetic *line* normally correspond to the boundaries of a phrase or clause (section 1.11). In a typical Shakespearean sonnet, most lines are complete sentences or clauses marked by editorial punctuation at line end. Clause boundaries are not realized consistently as pauses in ordinary speech. Like word boundaries, however, they are instantly identifiable by native speakers. Shakespearean actors rely on this ability when they pause within a line or speed past line end without pausing.

The poet's audience is "capable of distinguishing not only metrical from unmetrical lines but also more complex metrical lines from less complex lines."¹ An adequate metrical theory will provide measurements of *complexity* specific enough to test against the metrical facts. Complex verses and lines should have restricted frequency, especially toward the end of a larger metrical unit (section 1.11).

The low frequency of enjambment in traditional English meters cannot be explained by a purely syllabic theory, nor can such a theory explain why misalignment of *foot* boundaries with word boundaries inhibits other kinds of *complexity*. The most economical way to explain these metrical facts is to represent optimal *line* patterns as idealized sentences, optimal *foot* patterns as idealized words, and optimal x or S positions as idealized syllables. In addition to their explanatory value, such representations facilitate practical scansion. Any scansion system needs to match constituents of a metrical pattern with constituents of the poet's language. In traditional scansions, metrical constituents are rather vaguely defined and matching them to the poet's language requires ungrounded assumptions. The theory employed here matches linguistic constituents selected by the poet against linguistic constituents with *optimal form*. This more straightforward kind of matching can be held directly accountable to linguistic research and provides convenient evidence for such research.

Problems multiply when we go beyond Homer and Shakespeare (section 1.18). Syllabic notation cannot represent an alliterative meter that requires a specified number of words per *line* but imposes no restrictions on syllable count or stress placement. Syllabic notation is equally unsuitable for an Irish meter in which a *metrical syllable* can function simultaneously as a *foot* and a *line*. Analysis of such meters is straightforward, however, within a theory that derives metrical constituents from constituents of the poet's language. A language-based theory also allows for straightforward analysis of ancient Hebrew poetry (section 1.18). In the psalms of the Bible, *line* patterns are sentence patterns defined in terms of

syntax and **propositional** semantics, the characteristic features of the sentence as distinct from the word or syllable.

A syllabic notation for Old English poetry would require two types of **S position**, two types of **s position**, and at least three types of **x position**, one for unstressed words, a second for unstressed inflectional syllables, and a third for unstressed prefixes (section 4.2). Purely syllabic analogues for these distinctions would not be easy to find. Within a language-based theory, the required distinctions can be derived from basic principles of Old English versecraft: (1) verses have two word-based feet; (2) there is a **foot** pattern for every native word, including unstressed words and compounds; (3) extrametrical words can occur before either foot; and (4) **alliteration** acts like compound stress and **subordinates** following constituents within a given **metrical** domain. Language-based matching makes testable **predictions** about the frequency of verses with particular linguistic features and about their placement within the alliterative **line**.

Matching restrictions in *Beowulf* show that unstressed constituents are not simply unstressed but fall into distinct categories with varying **prominence** levels. When they have similar prominence, these constituents substitute for one another with some frequency; but in the verse-initial **anacrusis** position, the most prominent unstressed constituents (finite auxiliaries and forms of the verb *to be*) are never substituted for the least prominent ones (prefixes and negative particles). To my knowledge, metrically distinct classes of unstressed words have not been properly explained within general linguistics. Here as elsewhere a language-based theory of meter highlights interesting problems for linguists.

11.2 Historical Metrics and Historical Linguistics

Texts in Old English and cognate Germanic languages make it possible to trace a metrical tradition from birth to death. A language-based theory identifies starting and ending points for this project and facilitates analysis of developments in between.

Alliteration is universally associated with linguistic **prominence**. Alliterative meters have been found only in languages with a fixed position for the most prominent syllable in the word. In ancient Western Europe, alliterative meters developed spontaneously when the variable Indo-European accent changed to fixed initial stress, as shown by similar meters in Celtic, Germanic, and Italic languages (section 2.6). Word-based feet and **alliteration** arose hand in hand as the new fixed stress was used to demarcate word boundaries and to facilitate parsing of a sentence into

words (section 2.7). Each two-foot verse in the Old English line had the falling rhythm of a typical two-word phrase in late Proto-Germanic, which had the most prominent stress on the first word (section 2.8). Alliteration was obligatory on the first metrical stress of each verse. The alliterative pattern of the line followed the stress contour of a typical sentence in late Proto-Germanic, which had SOV word order and intermediate phrasal stress on a finite verb at the end. During this era, the end of the metrical line was most effectively marked by a weakly stressed verb that did not alliterate (section 2.9).

The alliterative tradition confronted serious challenges as English evolved from SOV to SVO. After the energy of articulation shifted to word-initial syllables, inflectional endings lost prominence and had to be replaced by unstressed function words, which obscured foot structure (section 4.4). In Middle English alliterative poetry, metrical feet were no longer used and phrasal stress replaced word stress as the basis for metrical patterning. In the Middle English b-verse, traditional placement of alliteration was maintained with the help of archaic constructions, but alliteration sometimes occurred on a prominent line-final constituent as well.

Middle English poets repaired injuries to the meter by regularizing traditional tendencies that were still observable (section 4.17). The old metrical constant of two word-feet evolved into a new constant of two primary lifts. In the a-verse, alliteration became mandatory on both primary lifts. Trochaic closure became obligatory at the end of the b-verse and unstressed syllables were governed by new rules for long dips. These new rules were implemented with the help of archaic word forms. When such archaisms were no longer comprehensible, the damage to alliterative tradition could not be repaired. Iambic pentameter now provided a better fit for literary English, favoring prestigious French borrowings and a higher frequency of native phrases in which an unstressed function word was followed by a stressed monosyllable (section 10.1). Word-foot principles arose once more in iambic meters and can already be observed in the *Gawain* poet's bob and wheel, where the principle of closure attracted iambic words toward the end of the line and repelled trochaic words. Prominent nuclear stress at the end of a Modern English sentence now provided the best location for a sound echo. End-rhyme replaced alliteration.

Historical metrics offers unique evidence for historical linguistics. In late Old English poetry, shifting of verbs to locations that were less appropriate from a metrical point of view measures the decline of archaic SOV syntax (section 4.11). In Middle English poetry, SOV syntax is used primarily to

meet strict requirements of the b-verse. In the less strictly governed a-verse, a much higher frequency of SVO syntax shows that Modern English word order was the norm for the poet's contemporaries.

11.3 Envoi

Some obvious next steps include language-based scansions of other Middle English alliterative poems. The results should be quite similar for *Patience* and *Cleanness* if, as commonly thought, the author of SGGK composed these poems. I have found no obvious differences in some preliminary work. In other poems we may find differences of metrical dialect like those that distinguish Shakespeare from Milton and Pope.² Poems may differ in their tolerance for complex *variants* and in their treatment of weak *-e*. Middle English rhymed poetry provides a wealth of additional material for language-based metrical analysis.

This study has focused on elements of continuity in Middle English alliterative meter, isolating archaic constraints on verse form that left traces in SGGK. Alliterative poets had worked hard to maintain traditional standards into the fourteenth century. Middle English verse types with no Old English precedents are vanishingly rare in SGGK and apparent examples may not be authentic. Unprecedented realizations of verse types often employ compensatory measures such as bounding of non-traditional dips with demarcative *alliteration*. The most extreme departures from tradition are restricted to the a-verse by the *principle of closure* and most of them occur in the uniquely tolerant type A1. Further work will be required to determine how all the archaic constraints might have been formulated in a coherent rule system *internalized* by Middle English poets. Inherited formulaic techniques may have preserved some tendencies independently of the metrical rules, but exactly how remains unclear. Much interesting work remains to be done.

I have focused on metrical norms derived from linguistic norms of English. The same approach can be applied to poetry in any language. I hope that qualified researchers will attempt language-based theories for many other traditions in the near future. Some traditions may provide sufficient material for study of metrical evolution. In other traditions, living poets may be available to guide our assessment of the metrical facts. Further language-based research will enhance our understanding of poetic communication and provide an informative context for research on any meter, traditional or experimental.

Advances in theoretical linguistics have provided remarkable insights into what poets do and how audiences appreciate their efforts. Further

insights will come more quickly if linguists and philologists collaborate. My *universalist* approach to Middle English meter would have been impossible without the foundation provided by Putter, Jefferson, Stokes, Inoue, Cable, Duggan, Turville-Petre, and other medievalists. I hope that contemporary poets will also participate in language-based research. Publications by W. H. Auden and Seamus Heaney, to mention just two obvious examples, make it clear that poetic creation at the highest level is compatible with an interest in linguistics.

The critic Jonathan Culler remarked that his structuralist approach had been applied to verse primarily by a medievalist.³ If interest in poetic form seems strongest for the earlier periods, that is partly for practical reasons. Metrics is an indispensable aid to analysis of early languages and to recovery of poetic art from manuscripts. Poems in contemporary English may sometimes be easier to read but their structure is seldom easier to explain. What medievalists have learned can be useful to anyone interested in poetry.

Notes

Chapter 1 General Principles of Poetic Form

1. Algeo and Butcher, *Origins*.
2. For recent work, see Croft, *Typology and Universals*, and Shopen, *Typology and Description*.
3. See Bach and Harms, *Universals*, for papers responding to Chomsky, *Aspects*.
4. Sievers, "Rhythmik."
5. Yakovlev, "Development of alliterative metre." Reviewed in Cable, "Alliterative metrics." Yakovlev provides evidence that late metrical features were due to language change rather than reinvention, as I had argued from a different theoretical perspective (Russom, "Middle English alliterative meter" and "Evolution of the a-verse").
6. See especially Hanson and Kiparsky, "Parametric theory," and publications cited there.
7. Cited from Meredith, *Partial Accounts*, p. 5.
8. The phonetic alphabet used here is common in Old and Middle English textbooks. Characters in the phonetic alphabet are enclosed in square brackets. Spellings are enclosed in angle brackets.
9. For detailed discussion, see E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, p. xix.
10. In *Beowulf*, for example, the raven tells the eagle that he has feasted on dead warriors with the wolf (verses 3023b–25b). Letters appended to line numbers in citations from Old English poems indicate the first verse of the line (the a-verse) or the second (the b-verse). I cite *Beowulf*, abbreviated as "Beo," from Fulk et al. (eds.), *Klaeber's "Beowulf"*.
11. Cited from Harrison (ed.), *Shakespeare*, p. 1598.
12. Hogan, "Literary universals," 227.
13. See Jakobson, "Closing statements."
14. Cited from Murphy (ed.), *Lyrics*, p. 106. Here as generally in this book I remove or simplify editorial diacritics irrelevant to the problem at hand.
15. Murphy, *Metrics*, pp. 36–39.
16. Beekes, *Indo-European Linguistics*, pp. 135–36.

17. Murphy, *Metrics*, p. 38.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
19. Kuryłowicz, *Sprachlichen Grundlagen*, pp. 13–16.
20. Campbell, *Grammar*, pp. 146, 159.
21. Kessler and Treiman, “Syllable structure.”
22. Jackendoff, *Consciousness*, pp. 64–66.
23. Gleitman and Wanner, “State of the art.”
24. Albright and Hayes, “Rules vs. analogy.”
25. Jackendoff, *Consciousness*, pp. 86–90.
26. Feynman, *Physical Law*, p. 39.
27. Hogan, “Literary universals,” 239.
28. Cited from Keynes (ed.), *Blake*, pp. 72–73, with punctuation and capitalization modernized to facilitate discussion.
29. Hayes, “English meter,” 373.
30. Hogan, “Literary universals,” 229. In large symphonic compositions with melodic themes in several keys, closure of the whole work is signaled by return to the opening theme in the opening key. The last movement of a sonata often includes a secondary theme transposed from its secondary key to the opening key. As with *dare* in Blake’s near-repetition of his opening stanza, this registers our progress through a complex developmental phase in the middle of the work. See Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *Tonal Music*, p. 199; Ratner, *Listener’s Art*, p. 235.
31. Murphy, *Metrics*, pp. 43–45.
32. Cited from Bridges (ed.), *Poems of Hopkins*, p. 30, with diacritics suppressed and punctuation modernized.
33. Mackenzie (ed.), *Poetical Works*, pp. 384–85. Shakespeare’s rhythms are surveyed in sections 1.15–1.20.
34. Line 8 has normal iambic rhythm with the archaic realization spelled *whate’er*, but in a modern poem that variant would create its own kind of complexity.
35. For systematic analysis of musical form in relation to linguistic form, see Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *Tonal Music*. On the relation between musical phrasing and literary syntax in European tradition, see Keller, *Phrasing and Articulation*, pp. 7–9.
36. Murphy, *Metrics*, p. 28 note 1. For the *deibide* rhyme I assume vocalic *r* in *furs* and *players*.
37. In “The Gentleman of Shalott,” for example, Elizabeth Bishop employs modernist slant rhymes and extreme forms of enjambment but positions complete sentences as Hopkins does for closure and introductory effects. Bishop’s non-traditional rhymes are concentrated in the middle portions of her stanzas, while the more traditional rhymes are concentrated at beginnings and ends (Bishop, *Poems*, pp. 11–12).

38. Representative examples from Kennedy (ed.), *Selected Poems*, are “re/-new -/ing” (p. 19) and, even more radically, “dream-/S” (p. 135), where the line ends between a root and a plural inflection. Note, however, that these divisions occur at morphological breaks within the word, not between any two letters at random.
39. Dresher and Lahiri, “Coherence.”
40. Hogan, “Literary universals,” 241.
41. Miller, “Magical number seven.”
42. Hogan, “Literary universals,” 242.
43. Kiparsky, “Kalevala” and “Rigveda,” surveys use of prosodic variants in important poetic traditions. In “Dvandvas” and “Stratal OT,” Kiparsky employs his version of Optimality Theory (OT) to explain such variations.
44. Lines of iambic pentameter cited in sections 1.15–20 come from Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure.” These scansiones are offered as independent witnesses for a word-foot theory of English iambic poetry.
45. Kiparsky, “Kalevala.”
46. Bugge and Sievers, “Vokalverkürzung.”
47. As for example in Chomsky and Halle, *Sound Pattern*.
48. For a concise summary, see Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” 233–55.
49. See especially Fabb and Halle, *Meter in Poetry*; Cable, *Alliterative Tradition*; Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*; and Bliss, *Metre of “Beowulf.”*
50. Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” 234. The next two quotations from Kiparsky are on the same page.
51. It is also possible that Shakespeare could pronounce *therefore* with accent on the second syllable.
52. Russom, “Universalist metrics,” 353–55.
53. Rosenberg, *Folk-Preacher*.
54. Kuryłowicz, *Grammar and Metrics*, p. 176.
55. Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, p. 98.
56. Fabb and Halle, *Meter in Poetry*, pp. 268–84.
57. These lines and their translations are cited from Lord, *Singer*, p. 42.
58. The Slavic caesura is discussed along with other non-phonetic aspects of poetic form in Jakobson, “Vowel alliteration.”
59. Text, dating, and translation follow Carney, “Archaic Irish verse,” 44–45, but without suggested emendations that would restore additional structure to the poem.
60. *Ibid.*, 46.
61. Hsieh, *Jueju Verse*, p. 181.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–88.
63. Cited from Murphy (ed.), *Lyrics*, p. 90.
64. Such rhyming words are defined as metrical feet in Murphy, *Metrics*, p. 28.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
66. Fabb and Halle, *Meter in Poetry*, p. 11.
67. Fabb and Halle cite Hanson and Kiparsky, “Parametric theory,” as a representative example of the language-based approach. For an up-to-date survey of theoretical approaches to English meters, see Duffell, *New History*.
68. Fabb and Halle, *Meter in Poetry*, pp. 46–7.
69. Russom, “Universalist metrics,” 342–43.

Chapter 2 Indo-European and Germanic Meters

1. Youmans, “Generative meter.”
2. Nagy, *Comparative Studies*.
3. Beekes, *Indo-European Linguistics*, p. 13.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
5. Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, p. 174.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 422.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–21.
8. Lord, *Singer*, p. 32.
9. Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, p. 300.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
11. Russom, “Drink of death,” pp. 181–82.
12. Cited from Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Poetic Records*. Citations of Old English poetry come from *Poetic Records* when no other edition is specified. Titles for Old English poems are abbreviated as in Huthcheson, *Poetic Metre*. Translations from early English and Norse alliterative poetry are my own and prioritize clear representation of metrically relevant features rather than precise semantic force.
13. Campbell, *Grammar*, pp. 12–20.
14. For consistency I mark vowel length in Old English citations when editors do not mark it.
15. Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, pp. 68–84.
16. Item 2 is cited as representative in Beekes, *Indo-European Linguistics*, p. 43.
17. Cedric H. Whitman, in his preface to Nagy, *Comparative Studies*, p. xii.
18. Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, pp. 19–21.
19. Gade, *Dróttkvætt Poetry*, p. 4.
20. Ball (ed.), *Celtic Languages*, pp. 71–75.
21. Salmons, *Language Contact*, p. 5.
22. For dissent see Pulgram, *Latin-Romance Phonology*, pp. 92–113.
23. Kiparsky, “Role of linguistics,” 231.
24. Cited from Mazzarino (ed.), *De Agri Cultura*. Here as in other citations of Celtic and Italic poetry I remove editorial apparatus not pertinent to our main

- concerns and make slight changes in editorial translations to bring out relevant metrical features.
25. Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, p. 224.
 26. The text follows Poultney (ed.), *Bronze Tables*, pp. 278–80. I have formatted it in two-word lines for ease of comparison with other alliterative passages. The translation draws on Poultney's glossary as well as his facing translation.
 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
 28. Text, translation, and dating follow Watkins, *Indo-European Poetics*, p. 220.
 29. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–225.
 30. The text follows Murphy (ed.), *Metrics*, p. 5. The translation uses Murphy's glossary.
 31. Murphy, *Metrics*, p. 5. The translation uses Murphy's glossary.
 32. Text and translation follow Stewart (ed.), *Lebor Gabála*, pp. 114–17.
 33. Travis, *Celtic Versecraft*, p. 53.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 52. The forms *iáth*, *nhÉreñn*, and *hérmac* alliterate according to the Irish rules.
 35. Cited from Dillon (ed.), *Serglige*, p. 7. The translation uses Dillon's glossary.
 36. On the metrical consequences of lenition, see Murphy, *Metrics*, p. 37.
 37. Cited from Neckel, *Edda*, vol. 1, pp. 3–4. Subsequent citations of Eddic poetry come from this edition as well. On Snorri's use of *Völuspá*, see Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, p. xxv. For useful discussion of Germanic trends in linguistic and metrical evolution, see Solopova, "Alliteration and prosody."
 38. Sievers, "Rhythmik" and *Altgermanische Metrik*.
 39. Ramat, *Germanische*, p. 18.
 40. In highlighting the left edge of a stressed word, the stress also demarcates any preceding unstressed word or prefix, which can serve as a light word foot. Implications of Ramat's analysis for West Indo-European languages are discussed in Salmons, *Language Contact*, pp. 167–70.
 41. Greenberg, "Universals of grammar."
 42. Antonsen, *Runic Inscriptions*, p. 24.
 43. For the text, see Krause, *Runen*, p. 72. Here and elsewhere I highlight alliterating constituents in boldface, generally the whole root, setting aside irrelevant problems of syllabification.
 44. Campbell, *Grammar*, p. 35.
 45. Chomsky and Halle, *Sound Pattern*, p. 90.
 46. Dryer, "Word order," 90–91.
 47. Antonsen, *Runic Inscriptions*, p. 25.
 48. Dryer, "Word order," 62–64.
 49. *Ibid.*, 89.
 50. *Ibid.*, 62.

51. *Ibid.*, 101.
52. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 110–12. On treatment of stressed syllables as metrically unstressed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, see [section 8.5](#).
53. Dryer, “Word order,” 94.
54. Antonsen, *Runic Inscriptions*, p. 24.
55. Dryer, “Word order,” 72.
56. Antonsen, *Runic Inscriptions*, p. 24.
57. Dryer, “Word order,” 62.
58. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, vol. 1, p. 572.
59. For alliterative patterning in verses with more than two metrical stresses, see Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 64–100.

Chapter 3 Old English Meter in the Era of *Beowulf*

1. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 8–24. [Realization](#) of the verse as a natural syntactic constituent groups feet into well-defined pairs.
2. Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik*, pp. 120–44.
3. These principles make it necessary to divide types B and C before the first stress rather than between stresses as Sievers does (Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 17–19).
4. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 14–16.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.
6. This norm, called the *rule of precedence*, was discovered by Sievers (*Altgermanische Metrik*, pp. 41–46).
7. In iambic pentameter, which employs a single foot pattern, the final unstressed syllable of a stressed word may stand outside an iambic foot as extrametrical (cf. Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” 231). The unstressed syllable of an iambic word always occupies a metrical position, however.
8. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 33–38.
9. A similar universalist approach to linguistic analysis is [Optimality](#) Theory (OT), which employs violable rules that differ in strength and may conflict with one another. See Kager, *Optimality Theory*; Kiparsky, “Dvandvas” and “Stratal OT.” Violable rules for iambic pentameter are proposed in Hayes et al., “Maxent Grammars.”
10. A unique example in *Beowulf* is verse 2668b, which ends with *fullǣstu*, an Ssx finite verb derived from a compound noun. Such type C verses do not conform entirely to [N1](#) because the verb alliterates.
11. In ordinary language, word patterns can be modified within small phrases and phrase patterns can be modified within the sentence (Cf. Kiparsky, “Rhythmic Structure,” 218–23). Old English line patterns are also built up

- from the inside out, with foot complexity re-evaluated at verse level and verse complexity re-evaluated at line level.
12. For further discussion of metrical variants, see Russom, “Metrical complexity.”
 13. See Russom, “Explanatory metrics”; and Sauer, *Nominalkomposita*, pp. 719–22.
 14. Half-line divisions in the Oswald narrative are marked by punctuation in the Old English manuscript. The text is cited from Cassidy and Ringler, *Bright’s Grammar*, pp. 239–49, a convenient edition keyed to a full glossary.
 15. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 133–44.
 16. On the optimal linguistic status of the Sx pattern in Old English, see Drescher and Lahiri, “Coherence.”
 17. Verse counts for Old and Middle English poetry are derived from electronic databases that cannot be captured economically on the printed page. Listing verse numbers for every count would make the book far too long. Researchers interested in obtaining copies of the databases are encouraged to contact the author, currently at Brown University, Box 1852, Providence RI 02912 (geoffrey_russom@brown.edu).
 18. For comparison of an early prose passage with a later poem, see Russom, “Metrical complexity.”
 19. Given a large set of verses, metrists will naturally disagree about scansion in some instances. I offer my own counts for clarity and concreteness. In accord with standard scientific practice, the theory proposed in this book allows for approximate measurement and can be validated by any reasonable verse-counting procedure. On the roles of theoretical simplicity and empirical validation in scientific progress, see Feynman, *Physical Law*, p. 171.
 20. Cable, *Meter and Melody*, pp. 32–44; Russom, *Germanic Metre*, pp. 47–59.
 21. Bliss, *Metre of “Beowulf,”* p. 43.
 22. Cf. 93b, 666b, 1773b, 1877b, and 2247b.
 23. Russom, *Germanic Metre*, p. 59.
 24. To be extrametrical, a syllable must be perceived as standing outside a foot that is filled with linguistic material. See [section 3.13](#) for an interesting complication in hypermetrical verses. Foot-internal elision and resolution assign two abnormally short syllables to one metrical position. Neither short syllable is extrametrical in such cases.
 25. On the need to distinguish word stress from phrasal stress in theoretical linguistics, see Kiparsky, “Dvandvas” and “Stratal OT.”
 26. Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, p. 257.
 27. For discussion of weak class II verbs, see Russom, “Constraints on resolution,” pp. 154–56.
 28. Fulk et al. (eds.), *Klaeber’s “Beowulf,”* p. 328. In routine discussion of numbered lines I will refer to this as the standard edition.

29. In words like *unforhte* ‘unafraid,’ *un-* can be interpreted as stressed or unstressed. Ambiguous variants containing such words are excluded from verse counts.
30. In the lexicalized compound *cupboard*, for example, *cup* and *board* have lost their independent meanings and a word-level rule has reduced [pb] to [b].
31. Although they can facilitate metrical composition, Old English poetic compounds are handled with care to avoid repetitiousness (Russom, “Aesthetic criteria”). Like other traditional elements of form, poetic compounds promote extended meditation on defining themes of a genre.
32. Verses 53b, 1525b, 1869b, 2020b, and 2032b. In the standard edition, 53b is emended for semantic reasons and the other examples are eliminated by interpretation of scribal vowels as non-syllabic.
33. Verses 546a, 581a, 1690a, 1919a, 2062a, 2350a, and 3142a.
34. A more precise scansion for this particular verse would be xx(x)/Sxxs, since *scolde* is more prominent than *his*. The notation (x)x is used for convenience only and does not rule out identification of the first unstressed word as the light foot proper.
35. A possible example in Beo 2935a is *Hrefnes Holt* ‘Raven’s Wood / Ravenswood,’ which may be a compound proper name.
36. Cf. 1114a, 1531a, 1539a, and 1543a.
37. Campbell, *Grammar*, p. 36.
38. Collinge, *Laws*, p. 241. Professor Mary Blockley suggested this explanation to me.
39. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 15–16.
40. For a handful of interesting exceptions, see *ibid.*, pp. 76–79.
41. For systematic analysis of resolution and its influence on verse placement, see Russom, *Germanic Metre*, pp. 97–117.
42. Bliss, *Metre of “Beowulf,”* pp. 61–2.
43. Items 51a–b might also be scanned with an initial S foot followed by an extrametrical syllable, but clear cases of initial S feet are not common in hypermetrical verses. Scansion of the initial foot as S:x in 51a–b assumes a more complex *realization* of a less complex pattern. For recent work on such problems, see Hartman, “Gnomic Hypermetrics.”
44. Russom, *Old English Meter*, p. 29.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–63. Occasional placement of an extrametrical syllable in the medial dip of the embedded normal verse, as in 52b, shows that the higher-order foot had an internal boundary and was perceived as a metrical compounding of two smaller feet. The extrametrical syllable in such cases stands outside the metrical pattern between the smaller feet.
46. In this respect, linguistic and metrical principles are like the laws of physics, which are simple in isolation but interfere with one another to produce complex results (Feynman, *Physical Law*, pp. 122–24).

Chapter 4 From Late Old English Meter to Middle English Meter

1. Fulk, *History*, pp. 381–91.
2. The odds for a coin landing heads-up nineteen times out of twenty are one in 52,428.8 – the number of distinct outcomes fulfilling the prediction (20) divided by the number of possible outcomes (2²⁰).
3. Hanson and Kiparsky, “Parametric theory,” 295.
4. Lehmann, “Broken cadences.”
5. Russom, “Verse types.”
6. The examples are from Scragg (ed.), *Maldon*, p. 53.
7. Fulk, *History*, pp. 348–68, 400–04.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 415–18.
9. The longer late poems are cited from Griffith (ed.), *Judith*, and Scragg (ed.), *Maldon*. *Brunanburh* and *Elene* are cited from Krapp and Dobbie, *Poetic Records*. For recent work on the chronology of Old English poems, see Neidorf, *Dating of Beowulf*.
10. Hutcheson, *Poetic Metre*, p. 35. I refer to this work for impartial assessments of conformity to the *Beowulf* poet’s metrical practice. Hutcheson’s assessments for *Brunanburh*, *Judith*, and *Maldon* appear on pp. 37–38.
11. Fulk, *History*, p. 252.
12. On the orderly pathway through reduction to loss, see Russom, “Germanic syllable.”
13. Russom, “Explanatory metrics.”
14. Russom, *Germanic Metre*, pp. 150–51.
15. Fulk, *History*, p. 256.
16. Clark, “*Battle of Maldon*.”
17. Russom, “Aesthetic criteria.”
18. Russom, “Kuhn’s laws.”
19. Item (3c), an apparent example in type Da, is excluded as a likely candidate for emendation to type A1.
20. Fulk et al. (eds.), *Klaeber’s “Beowulf,”* p. 329.
21. Fulk, *History*, pp. 404–06.
22. For systematic analysis of these distributions, see Russom, “Verse types.”
23. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 91–92.
24. On the role of drudgery in scientific progress, see Feynman, *Physical Law*, pp. 15–16.
25. Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” identifies several dialects of iambic pentameter as practiced by Donne, Wyatt, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope.
26. With regard to identification of clause boundaries, see Blockley, *Poetic Syntax*.
27. Fulk et al. (eds.), *Klaeber’s “Beowulf,”* pp. 334–35.
28. Griffith (ed.), *Judith*, p. 31.
29. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 264.

30. Fulk et al. (eds.), *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* p. 335.
31. Griffith (ed.), *Judith*, pp. 25–26.
32. *Maldon* 32b and 192b look like additional instances but they involve palatal and velar *g*, which are treated as separate sounds in *Maldon*.
33. Griffith (ed.), *Judith*, pp. 27–28.
34. Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change*, pp. 238–310.
35. The Old English *Death of Edward*, a poem of thirty-four lines, shows that works metrically comparable to *Maldon* were composed at least until AD 1065. *Durham*, a similar poem of twenty-one lines, may have been composed between AD 1104 and 1009. See Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Poetic Records*, vol. vi, pp. xlv–xlv.
36. T. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 31–37.
38. Fulk, *History*, p. 259. *The Death of Alfred*, composed no earlier than AD 1036, has many similar lines with rhyme and unusual alliteration.
39. As observed in Duggan, “Final *-e*,” 145.
40. Cable, *Alliterative Tradition*, p. 42; cf. Russom, “Middle English meter,” 297–99.
41. Recent interest begins with Cable, “Middle English meter,” and Duggan, “Final *-e*.”
42. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 217–54.
43. An asymmetric a-verse rule requiring two long dips or three lifts was proposed in Cable, *Alliterative Tradition*, p. 92. This turned out to be too restrictive. Compare Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 225–26.
44. Russom, *Germanic Metre*, pp. 31–37.
45. Russom, “Three Eddic meters.”
46. *Ibid.*, 81–83.
47. Scragg (ed.), *Maldon*, pp. 29, 53.
48. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 145–211, provide manuscript evidence for their two-beat metrical constant, which corresponds to my constant of two primary lifts. I use *primary lift* rather than *beat* to emphasize that the Middle English *beats* had Old English antecedents.
49. My *secondary lift* corresponds to the *heavy element at verse ending* of Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 226.
50. Calhoun, “Metrical Structure,” calls the three positions of phrasal stress *pre-nuclear*, *nuclear*, and *post-nuclear*, theorizing them as elements of metrical prosodic structure (where “metrical” is a term of theoretical phonology borrowed from the study of poetic and musical form). The post-nuclear position corresponds to the secondary lift of a heavy Middle English a-verse.
51. For an important survey of the new metrical options and related principles of phrasal stress, see Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 145–216.

52. Prokosch, *Germanic Grammar*, p. 140.

53. Drescher and Lahiri, “Coherence,” 279–83.

Chapter 5 Middle English Type A₁ and the Hypermetrical B-Verse

1. The hypermetrical b-verse is introduced in [section 5.4](#).
2. Theoretically, a verse-initial or verse-final syllable could stand outside the verse on an extrametrical position, but this option was not available in Middle English alliterative meter and is probably workable only in a meter with a single verse or line pattern.
3. The (x) notation is employed to facilitate discussion of closely related patterns and does not imply that there is a single basic pattern for each verse type, with optional syllables somehow insignificant. Addition of an optional syllable changes the metrical pattern.
4. SGGK is cited from Tolkien and Gordon (eds.), *Gawain*. Works with closely related meter are cited from Anderson (ed.), *Patience*; Menner (ed.), *Purity*; and Savage (ed.), *St. Erkenwald*.
5. See Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, verses 119b, 213b, 259b, 554b, 625b, 832b, 882b, 1222b, 1235b, 1517b, 1526b (item [1b](#)), 1537b, 1650b, and 1991b. Abbreviated titles in line references are from this edition, with G for SGGK, Pe for *Pearl*, Pa for *Patience*, and C for *Cleanness* (also known as *Purity*).
6. [Ibid.](#), pp. xxvi–xxx. I will refer to “Putter and Stokes” in routine discussion of individual lines as printed in their edition.
7. Cf. 157a, 1129a, 1650a, and 1725a.
8. Inoue, “Long medial dip.”
9. A sequence of four unstressed syllables provides salient contrast because such sequences do not often occur in ordinary speech (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 233).
10. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*; McJimsey, *Irregular -E*. Findings from these works are applied to alliterative poetry in Putter et al., *Studies*.
11. McJimsey, *Irregular -E*, p. 35.
12. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 174.
13. [Ibid.](#), pp. 52–54.
14. Words can have more than one metrical value when native speakers are aware of alternative phonological values. In Kiparsky, “Kalevala” and “Rigveda,” such alternative values were theorized within a classical generative framework. In the more recent “Dvandvas” and “Stratal OT,” Kiparsky employs the framework of Stratal [Optimality Theory](#), with archaic metrical values corresponding to [lexical representations](#) (word-level representations similar to citation forms) and innovating values

corresponding to [postlexical representations](#) (representations of words at phrase level).

15. Yakovlev, “Final *-e*,” shows that weak *-e* was present in the *Gawain* poet’s internalized grammar and was not an artificial device of poetic tradition.
16. Relevant features of iambic meter are introduced in [sections 1.16](#) and [1.17](#).
17. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, pp. 173–74; McJimsey, *Irregular -E*, pp. 25–26.
18. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 173.
19. [Ibid.](#), pp. 173–74.
20. [Ibid.](#), pp. 174–75.
21. McJimsey, *Irregular -E*, p. 6.
22. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 174.
23. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 117.
24. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, pp. 171–73.
25. Boroff, *Stylistic and Metrical Study*, p. 149. As we shall see ([section 8.17](#)), weak *-e* can also undergo contraction after a vowel in forms like *ladyes* ‘ladies.’
26. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 162.
27. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 169.
28. In some cases it might have been possible to leave the first syllable of the sequence unrealized and elide the second. I could not find unambiguous instances of such double reduction in SGGK, however, and cannot offer metrical evidence for more precise scansions.
29. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, pp. 170–71.
30. [Ibid.](#), pp. 170, 198.
31. [Ibid.](#), p. 202.
32. [Ibid.](#), p. 175.
33. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 101–12.
34. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, pp. 175–76.
35. [Ibid.](#), pp. 182–84.
36. [Ibid.](#), pp. 185–86.
37. Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, pp. 312–13.
38. Tolkien and Gordon (eds.), *Gawain*, pp. 150–51.
39. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 104 note 77.
40. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 185.
41. [Ibid.](#), p. 184.
42. [Ibid.](#), p. 184.
43. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 110.
44. Cf. Beo 93b, 666b, 1504b, 1773b, 1877b, and 2247b.
45. Cf. Beo 1163b, 1164b, 1165b, 1166b, 1167b, 1705b, and 1706b.
46. Orrin W. Robinson, *Germanic Languages*, pp. 134–35.
47. Russom, *Germanic Metre*, pp. 151–56.

48. Cf. 169b, 395b, 698b, 764b, 811b, and 2145b. Two of these could be regularized with dative *-e*, but that inflection is normally realized only when the preposition stands immediately before the noun. In 344b, *by yow* forms a phonological trochaic word (cf. [section 7.3, item 5f](#)).
49. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, p. 140.
50. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 27.
51. Apart from McJimsey's study, there has been little attention to development of analogical *-e* in nouns and adjectives, which is likely to have differed in dialects other than Chaucer's (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 255). More accurate scansions will require substantial new research.
52. Emended from o/i: 142b and 1235b. From i/i: 206b, 267b, 459b, 1117b, 1126b, 1141b, 1158b, 1211b, 1253b, 1293b, 1623b, 1999b, 2151b, 2206b, and 2367b. From i/4: 62b. From 2/2: 922b, 1072b, 1216b, 1266b, and 2392b.
53. Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, p. xxx.
54. The new rules are summarized in Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 217–54.
55. When it modifies a following noun, *oper* usually occupies the dip, but *oper* alliterates on a lift before the noun in 2016a.
56. Additional emendations: *#with kny3tes into (pe) halle* (62b; cf. 825); *#bifor(e) þe (halle) 3atez* (1693b); *#byhode_at þe laste* (1959b, < *behouded*, cf. Pe 928); *#with ful cold(e) syk(yng)ez* (1982b; cf. 753a); and *#ne (þe) syde pendaundes* (2431b). Similar emendations from Duggan, "Shape of the b-verse," 597–98: *of (þe) court þat he were* (903b; cf. 556a); *3e haf waled (wel) better* (1276b); or *a hundreth (of) seche* (1543b; cf. 1597 and 2294b); *of (þe) poynt of myn egge* (2392b). Although I can find no analogues in works attributed to the *Gawain* poet, verse 753b might imaginably have left the subject pronoun *I* unexpressed before *beseche*, as in constructions like *prithe and cry you mercy* (Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 3.6.55). Without the pronoun, 753b becomes *#beseche þe, lorde*, with the most common type A1 pattern. I owe thanks to an anonymous reader for the emendation in item (14a).
57. Cf. 87b, 131b, 179b, 250b, 253b, 379b, 444b, 458b, 461b, 477b, 554b, 578b, 595b, 596b, 600b, 607b, 794b, 842b, 857b, 858b, 890b, 904b, 914b, 938b, 1027b, 1082b, 1083b, 1090b, 1130b, 1220b, 1222b, 1254b, 1375b, 1406b, 1410b, 1435b, 1490b, 1521b, 1564b, 1692b, 1708b, 1807b, 1847b, 1914b, 1931b, 1965b, 2057b, 2077b, 2078b, 2080b, 2082b, 2102b, 2233b, 2277b, 2296b, 2378b, 2390b, 2417b, 2450b, 2497b, and 2520b.
58. Cf. 233b, 436b, 437b, 593b, 641b, 655b, 657b, 698b, 732b, 1154b, 1252b, 1459b, 1962b, 2081b, 2110b, and 2151b.
59. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 264.
60. Momma, *Composition*. Momma's criteria for linguistic stress are essentially the same as those required for analysis of sggk. In Middle English poetry, however, stress undergoes new kinds of metrical subordination (Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 145–216).

61. I speak of “alliteration” here because no alternative term is established. Words that “alliterate” in the dip lack the phrasal prominence required for an effective sound echo and were probably not perceived as alliterating.
62. Words alliterating in the dip include *all* (1345b), *com* (556b), *doun* (335b), *fele* (1116b), *ful* (44b, 499b, 524b, 894b, 1046b), *here* (1274b, 2247b, 2287b), *mony* (1957b), *much* (1795b), *ouer* (223b), *quop* (1489b), *sum* (96b), and *wel* (270b, 1244b, 1244b, 2359b).
63. These include *-lode* (133b), *-stille* (242b), and *-hap* (2511b).
64. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 159–62.
65. Youmans, “Generative meter” and “Syntactic inversions.”
66. Cf. 12b, 112b, 119b, 181b, 186b, 368b, 369b, 498b, 930b, 937b, 995b, 1118b, 1129b, 1131b, 1139b, 1212b, 1310b, 1330b, 1332b, 1336b, 1518b, 1583b, 1762b, 1880b, 1957b, 2003b, 2124b, 2127b, 2152b, 2407b, 2410b, 2422b, 2460b, and 2523b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1254b, 1914b, and 2450b.
67. Cf. 335b, 355b, 404b, 445b, 592b, 1050b, 1390b, 1673b, 1927b, and 2008b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1027b. In item (19b), the *-e* of *berde* seems to be confirmed by line-final placement but has no obvious grammatical justification.
68. Cf. 11b, 771b, 1142b, 1491b, 1610b, 1701b, 1881b, 2106b, 2268b, 2351b, and 2375b. With alliteration on both lifts: 250b.
69. Cf. 381b, 418b, 434b, 457b, 828b, 1105b, 1127b, 1226b, 1324b, 1374b, 1376b, 1465b, 1552b, 1691b, 1779b, and 2073b.
70. Dryer, “Word order,” 71.
71. Cf. 43b, 133b, 232b, 409b, 682b, 752b, 812b, 827b, 830b, 1128b, 1483b, 1529b, 1540b, 1634b, 1659b, 1674b, 1800b, 1857b, 2002b, 2015b, 2169b, 2213b, 2216b, 2260b, 2380b, and 2459b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1406b.
72. Cf. 66b, 345b, 1372b, 1676b, 1677b, 1719b, 1896b, and 2438b.
73. Cf. 624b, 1575b, 1726b, and 2262b.
74. Cf. 456b, 717b, 1065b, 1068b, and 2040b. With alliteration on both lifts: 2296b.
75. Cf. 8b, 67b, 285b, 308b, 350b, 367b, 421b, 425b, 895b, 921b, 936b, 1140b, 1171b, 1249b, 1305b, 1309b, 1339b, 1346b, 1437b, 1549b, 1609b, 1713b, 1735b, 1742b, 1752b, 1770b, 1859b, 1860b, 1870b, 1872b, 1877b, 1883b, 1897b, 1906b, 1936b, 2259b, 2288b, 2309b, and 2311b. With alliteration on both lifts: 596b. With expressed pronoun subject: 451b, 1223b, 1384b, 1385b, 1480b, 1484b, 1640b, 1704b, 1705b, 1829b, 1980b, 1984b, and 2361b.
76. Cf. 196b, 370b, 417b, 605b, 1031b, 1614b, 1723b, 1758b, 1796b, and 2243b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1564b.
77. Cf. 214b, 482b, 629b, 988b, 1633b, 1863b, 1874b, 2379b, 2468b, and 2498b.
78. Restoration of OV word order yields a common type A1 variant in 1679b, and *faythful I fynde þe* (> *I þe fynde*). OV word order yields a hypermetrical

b-verse in 1292b, *his disport zelde yow* (> *yow zelde*). As a hypermetrical variant, 1292b would be unusual (section 5.4), but not as unusual as a b-verse without trochaic closure. Like (23e–f) are 254b, 358b, 407b, 545b, 831b, 909b, 1111b, 1241b, 1961b, 2061b, 2094b, 2163b, 2335b, 2346b, 2350b, 2368b, and 2491b.

79. Cf. 504b, 536b, 540b, 702b, 831b, 977b, 1163b, 1179b, 1402b, 1461b, 1567b, 1624b, 1628b, 2061b, 2178b, 2335b, and 2346b.
80. Cf. 621b, 1098b 1986b, and 2178b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1435b.
81. Cf. 97b, 260b, 478b, 696b, 2266b, 2483b, and 2518b.
82. Like (25c): 237b, 748b, 971b, 1060b, 1165b, 1221b, 1433b, 1464b, 1661b, 1764b, 1777b, 1979b, 2033b, 2242b, and 2265b. With alliteration on both lifts: 1083b, 1375b, and 1692b. Like (25d): 123b, 611b, 804b, 1030b, 1386b, 1388b, 1582b, 1657b, and 2172b.
83. Like (26c): 410b, 455b, 460b, 546b, 1632b, 2063b, and 2273b. Like (26d): 701b, 1150b, 1161b, 1362b, 1588b, 1695b, and 1750b. With an adverb or conjunction in the initial dip: 244b, 485b, 1570b, 1603b, 2312b, and 2490b. With alliteration on both lifts: 2078b.
84. Cf. 98b, 359b, 798b, 1359b, and 1876b.
85. With AN order: 40b, 93b, 107b, 158b, 168b, 194b, 195b, 206b, 216b, 280b, 469b, 502b, 539b, 575b, 580b, 603b, 613b, 620b, 630b, 730b, 823b, 846b, 854b, 855b, 962b, 1026b, 1066b, 1253b, 1512b, 1517b, 1649b, 1650b, 1751b, 1809b, 1885b, 2027b, 2028b, 2029b, 2049b, 2166b, 2411b, 2412b, 2463b, and 2465b. Alliteration on both lifts: 554b, 857b, and 890b. With NA order: 108b, 154b, 188b, 288b, 310b, 392b, 405b, 454b, 503b, 506b, 551b, 553b, 733b, 754b, 849b, 852b, 884b, 917b, 998b, 999b, 1086b, 1134b, 1213b, 1320b, 1325b, 1413b, 1441b, 1466b, 1470b, 1519b, 1536b, 1623b, 1808b, 1820b, 1910b, 1912b, 2005b, 2123b, 2149b, 2294b, and 2342b. Alliteration on both lifts: 794b. Trivialization to AN order may have placed a monosyllabic word at the end of 1036b, which has the most highly favored b-verse pattern with restoration of archaic NA order (*#at Goddez fest [awne]* ‘at God’s own feast,’ with *awne* positioned as in 1519b).
86. Cf. 259b, 301b, 371b, 438b, 508b, 527b, 653b, 716b, 877b, 913b, 1198b, 1251b, 1391b, 1498b, 1773b, 1849b, 1926b, 1955b, 1956b, 2036b, 2047b, 2097b, 2189b, 2382b, and 2466b. With alliteration on both lifts: 2233b.
87. Like (29d) are 49b, 803b, 819b, 909b, 1241b, 2163b, 2167b, 2170b, and 2491b.
88. Cf. *as hit best semed* (73b), *and grener hit semed* (235b), and *As frekez pat semed fayn* (840). Modern order is best for the rhymed lines of SGGK, where the optimal rhyming word is a prominent one with a meaning pertinent to immediate context.
89. Cf. 509b, 578b, and 832b.

90. Cf. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 103. I set aside the question whether syllables occupying Middle English *s positions* always had linguistic stress or were sometimes relatively prominent unstressed syllables with vowels other than schwa. This is an interesting topic for further research.
91. Cf. 234b, 330b, 908b, 1057b, 1306b, 1331b, 1753b, 1775b, 1824b, 2071b, 2408b, 2419b, and 2505b. With alliteration in the initial dip: 124b.
92. Cf. 169b, 750b, 1032b, 1246b, 1393b, 1493b, 1497b, 1630b, 1804b, 1825b, 1856b, 1937b, 1958b, 2174b, 2201b, and 2231b.
93. Cf. 420b, 599b, 983b, 1058b, 1097b, 1569b, 1743b, 1802b, 1882b, 2072b, 2107b, 2176b, 2333b, and 2363b. With alliteration on both lifts: 437b.
94. Cf. 243b, 623b, 1754b, 2420b, and 2435b.
95. Cf. 2522b, line 27, and line 2527.
96. Kottler and Markman, *Concordance*, is especially useful for this purpose.
97. In works attributed to the *Gawain* poet, *wroȝte* is used for God's creative actions and sometimes alliterates with *wiȝe*. Cf. C 5a–b, C 280a, and Pa 206a–b.
98. Both features are present in C 1447b, *þat goud savor hade*.
99. Cf. *#when wenten þay to sete* (493b; cf. 1855a); *#þurȝ þyngez all(e) oþer* (645b; cf. 2342b); *#in his honde_his launce* (2197b; cf. line 206); and *#wyth a weppen felle* (2222b; cf. 288b).
100. Similarly, *#when he rayked [utter]* (1727b; cf. 1565b); *#þat I louy [swype]* (2095b; cf. C 987b); *#[to] be excused [neuer]* (2131b); and *#þer þou þryngez [fyrre]* (2397b).
101. Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, pp. 22–23. Although alliterative poetry evolved from a prehistoric oral tradition, use of traditional diction in the poems that survive does not allow us to conclude that they were orally composed. Claims about orality and literacy should be supported by stylistic analysis of each poet's work. See Russom, "Aesthetic criteria." On use of formulaic techniques by literate English and Russian poets, see Tarlinskaja, "Formulas."
102. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 38.
103. Stevens, "Laughter and game."
104. T. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*, pp. 13, 31, 35, 36.
105. As manuscript evidence confirms, "substitutions of specialised alliterative vocabulary are routine in scribal transmission" (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 127).
106. F. N. Robinson (ed.), *Works of Chaucer*, p. xxx.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 688.
108. Other works attributed to the *Gawain* poet show no such signs of additional revision. A higher frequency of metrical anomalies in sgGK can be attributed "to the natural consequences of intensive manual copying" (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 142).
109. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, p. 176.
110. Cf. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 123, 143.

Chapter 6 Type A1 in the A-Verse

1. Beo 2628a, a type Da variant, is the only other instance with disyllabic anacrusis and a long medial dip. Two long dips occur most often in type B, where the long initial dip represents a light foot rather than anacrusis (section 3.7).
2. The following replacements are not printed by Putter and Stokes, who refrain from systematic emendation in the a-verse: *pitosly[che]* 747a, *ilk[e]* 819a and 1468a, *brawdēn[e]* 580a, *wayned[e]* 984a, *der[ve]* 1000a, *3et[te]* 1105a and 2030a, *Hized[e]* 1152a, *ta[ke]n* 1210a, *all[le]* 1212a, *long[e]* 1440a, *telde[de]* 1648a, *vnworpi[lych]* 1835a, *perty[che]* 1941a, *stizt[e]lez* 2213a, *fleēs* 2272a, *loked[e]* 2333a, and *wayved[e]* 2459a. Although I do not scan it as such, *bornyst[e]* 582a, which modifies a collective plural noun, might be added to this list.
3. Cf. 306a, 581a, 820a, 1129a, 1201a, 1326a, 1357a, 1613a, 1905a, 2169a, 2230a, 2332a, and 2495a. With pronoun object: 10a, 522a, 984a, 1338a, 1346a, 1862a, 2154a, and 2312a. With expressed pronoun subject: 31a, 271a, 410a, 446a, 619a, 670a, 707a, 820a, 826a, 1394a, 1611a, 1626a, 1648a, 1849a, 1897a, 1928a, 2007a, 2103a, 2395a, and 2459a. With pronoun subject and object: 1031a, 1309a, 1529a, 1885a, 1964a, 2015a, 2105a, 2410a, 2456a, and 2467a.
4. With no expressed subject: 937a, 1059a, 1617a, and 1861a. With pronoun subject, as in item (4a): 1057a, 1595a, and 2349a. With noun subject: 850a, 888a, 1296a, 1460a, and 2359a.
5. Archaic syntax is used quite often in SGGK to remove a monosyllabic pronoun from the end of the a-verse. Shifting the pronoun usually improves the meter in an obvious way but is sometimes more difficult to explain. This is a subject for further research.
6. Cf. 203a, 223a, 605a, 695a, 1333a, 1354a, 1870a, 2030a, 2269a, and 2360a.
7. Cf. 405a, 1105a, 1113a, 1294a, 1302a, 1381a, 1487a, 1641a, 1801a, 2270a, 2288a, and 2407a.
8. Cf. 941a, 1046a, 2037a, and 2389a. With VO syntax and clause-final *not*, 2037b would be an unusual type Db variant, acceptable perhaps but less optimal than the manuscript variant.
9. The editors propose a similar remedy for Beo 2488a, which is two syllables short of required length, emending *blāc* ‘pale’ to *hilde-blāc* ‘battle-pale (dead).’
10. Cf. 937a and 1307a. In 794a, the preposed adverb is *innermore*. Putter and Stokes divide line 1323 after *in*, creating an a-verse of type Db.
11. Cf. 830a and 2169a. The remaining instances are 1668a, 2271a, 2272a, 2352a, and 2372a.
12. Cf. 316a, 815a, and 1194a. Putter and Stokes emend 815a to type Db.
13. Cf. 659a, 707a, and 1662a, where the adverb provides an ultralong dip. In 358a and 599a, the adverb provides a second long dip, as with *sy(þe)n* in (9b). The remaining two instances are 291a and 1170a.

14. The colon representing a word break within the foot is omitted here and in other cases when some of the enumerated examples have no corresponding word break.
15. Bliss, *Metre of "Beowulf,"* p. 42.
16. #*Per [spakly] he watz dispoyled* (860a; cf. Pa 338a); #*Pat oþer [godly] wyth a gorger* (957a; cf. 1376a); #*Naf I, [burn], now to busy* (1066a; cf. 1071b); #*And now 3e ar [wayned] (here), iwysse* (1230a; cf. 264a–b); #*And sy(þe)n [achaufed] by þe chymné* (1402a; cf. 883a); #*And [blipely] eft(e) in her bourdyng* (1404a; cf. 1217a–b); #*Pen al [samned] in a semblé* (1429a; cf. C 126); #*And 3e [, kni3t,] þat ar so cortays* (1525a; cf. 400a); #*[Lede,] Why! ar 3e lewed* (1528a; cf. 258a); #*[Hende,]_hit is not your honour* (1806a; cf. 1252a); #*Bi þat [clanly] watz comen* (1912a; cf. 393a); and #*And [Iwys] I mot nede3 hit were* (2510a).
17. Tolkien and Gordon (eds.), *Gawain*, p. 124.
18. #*[Wye], 3if 3e be Wawen* (1481a, < Sir, cf. G 2127a); #*For hit watz [ty3t] at þe terme* (1671a, < ne3, cf. Pe 503).
19. #*Ne(ue)r more þen þay wyste [ful wel]* (461a; cf. C 1699a); #*For hit is a figure [ful fin]* (627a; cf. 1737a); #*I wowche _hit saf fynly, [in fayth]* (1391a; cf. 676a); #*And we ar in þis valay [, I avow]* (2245a; cf. C 664a); and #*Bot hit is no ferly [, in fayþ]* (2414a; cf. 676a).
20. #*And wyth a [dedayn ful] dry3e* (335a, < countenance, cf. C 74a–b); #*Til [in melly] he watz so mat[e]* (1568a, < at þe last, cf. 644b); #*[In fayþ,] quop þat oþer freke* (2302a, < For soþe, cf. 676b). With (17b–c) cf. 609a and 484a.
21. With (18a–d), as emended, cf. 757a, 2467a, and 492a.
22. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 119–43.

Chapter 7 Types B and C

1. Middle English type B is introduced in [section 7.6](#).
2. Cf. 100b, 284b, 347b, 360b, 397b, 700b, 1055b, 1229b, 1408b, and 2513b.
3. Cf. 2196b, *þat e(ue)r I com inne*; and 2108b, *o(þe)r any mon elles*.
4. In 1662b, Putter and Stokes replace *howsoeuer* with the shorter form *howso*, eliminating the single instance on [Table 7.1](#) with an ultralong dip. In G 1216b, a second long dip can be avoided by substituting the short variant *bos* for *byhouez*. The result is the most common variant of type C (Duggan, “Shape of the b-verse,” 580).
5. Cf. 380b, 584b, 1063b, 2179b, and 2291b.
6. Cf. 182b, 183b, 226b, 785b, 906b, 1290b, 1476b, 1901b, 2051b, 2317b, 2331b, 2332b, and 2442b.
7. Cf. 100b, 1099b, and 2337b.

8. Cf. 20b, 89b, 284b, 347b, 360b, 704b, 1308b, 1381b, 1408b, 1444b, and 2345b.
9. Cf. 10b, 70b, 117b, 477b, 700b, 2083b, and 2140b.
10. Like (11a) are 1953b, 2051b, and 2432b. Like (11b) are 1487b and 1224b.
11. Apparent examples with normal alliteration: 51a, 536a, 573a, 577a, 879a, 1432a, 2214a, and 2449a. With normal alliteration and an ultralong dip: 1157a, 1614a, 2106a, 2296a, and 2394a. Verse 2296a might also be analyzed as type Da with alliteration on *hatz* ‘has,’ used as a main verb.
12. Verses 130a, 544a, 1062a, 2244a, 2400a, and 2445a.
13. Emended to type A1: *Pe most kyð [of all] knyȝtez* (51a); *For now is Gawayn þe gode* (2214a, < *god(e) Gawayn*). To type B: *#Of a ble(e)aunt ful broun* (879a, < *broun ble(e)aunt*); *#Per as þe rocher ful rogh* (1432a, < *rogh rocher*). To type Da: *[Comly] aboute_his knez knaged* (577a); To type Db: *#ȝet quyl Al hal[lowen] day* (536a, < *Alhalday*).
14. Cf. 1614a, 2106a, 2296a, and 2394a.
15. I have emended to the suffix *-lych(e)* in (15b) to prevent elision of *-ly* with a following vowel, which would destroy the second long dip.
16. Cf. 96a, 367a, 395a, 397a, 661a, 763a, 1198a, 1279a, 1463a, 1478a, 1509a, 1522a, 1847a, 1858a, 1911a, 1981a, 2040a, 2220a, and 2263a.
17. Cf. 1a, 620a, and 1006a.
18. Cf. 280a, 631a, 1034a, 1168a, 1172a, 1491a, 1551a, 1606a, 1846a, 1895a, 1936a, and 1982a.
19. Old English monosyllables with unstressed prefixes always counted as two words in poetry, but in Middle English the prefix was more closely bound to the root. A native unstressed prefix could acquire word-initial stress and alliteration in SGGK, in which case the prefix must have been included in the domain of application for the word-level rule assigning primary stress to initial syllables. For convenience I will refer to native Middle English monosyllables with unstressed prefixes as xS words, but the boundary between prefix and root must still have been perceptible, as shown by instances in which the root syllable alliterates.
20. Here the compound probably scans as *midmórn*, with the metrical value of Modern English *mànkínd*.
21. Cf. 947a, 1933a, 1970a, and 2215a.
22. Cf. 294a, 295a, 402a, 557a, 581a, 819a, 1033a, 1034a, 1184a, 1292a, 1330a, 1606a, 1607a, 1772a, 1780a, 1827a, 1878a, 2286a, and 2368a.
23. Campbell, *Grammar*, pp. 97–98. Variants like (19) provide no evidence for alliteration on unstressed syllables.
24. Cf. 1776a, 1792a, and 1938a.
25. Cf. 279a, 366a, 471a, 527a, 597a, 691a, 1079a, 1339a, 1493a, 1523a, 1549a, 1558a, 1682a, 1855a, and 1936a.

26. The other adverb-verb instances are 1072a and 1438a. Verse 757a is included in the count.
27. #*Bi þay wer(e) tened at þe [top]* (1169a, < *hy3(e)*, cf. Pa 229a); #*Ho comes nerre [anon]* (1305a, < *with þat*, cf. C 480a); #*He [gly3t on] hir so glorious* (1760a, < *se3*, cf. 970a); #*And þat 3e telle me [as tyt]* (1785a, < *þat now*, cf. C 64a); #*For I mot [metely]_as 3e wot* (1965a, < *nedes*, cf. 1004b); #*Pat oþer ferkez hym [forth]* (2013a, < *vp*, cf. 1072a–b); #*Now [gotz] wel, on Godez half* (2149a, < *farez*, cf. Pa 171); #*As hit com glydande_[a3ayn]* (2266a, < *adoun*, cf. 815b). A similar emendation for an apparent example of type B in the b-verse: #*displese yow [neuer]* (1839b, < *noz3t*, cf. 470b).
28. #*And [þe wi3] watz Wawen hymself* (906a, < *hit*, cf. 815a); #*And þus [þe burn] bourded a3ayn* (1217a, < *he*, cf. 922a); '*Pat watz not forward*,' *quoþ [þe freke]* (1395a, < *he*, cf. 1105a); #*As [a gome]_(vp)on a gryndelston* (2202a, < *one*, cf. 325a).
29. Cf. verse 27a. Semantically inessential *in erde* also appears in 881a and 2416a.
30. In most such cases a formulaic addition can transform a dubious B variant into an acceptable Db variant: #*Pat [verayly]_I wythout(e) vylany(e)* (345a; cf. 1375a); #*Pat [truly] for to telle þerof* (1008a; cf. 406a); #*As [holdely]_I am halden þerto* (1040a; cf. 1875a, 2129a); #*Hit is þe worchyp [, worþy]_of yourself* (1267a; cf. 1276a); #*And [quikly] þe corb{ele}s fee* (1355a; cf. 1324a); #*I am [cofly]_at your comaundement* (1501a; cf. C 1428a); #*Pat [a wi3] so worþy_as 3e* (1537a; cf. 1244a); #*Ther(e) watz [big] blawyn of prys* (1601a; cf. 1141a); #*3if þay [cheþly] for charyté* (2055a; cf. 1876a); #*When þou wypped [wy3tly]_of my hed(e)* (2249a; cf. 688a); and #*Pus in [apel] Arthurus day* (2522a; cf. 904a). Two other formulaic emendations stay within type B: #*For me þink hit not sem[e]ly, [sir]* (348a; cf. 1222a); and #*3if any wer(e) so vilanous[, avoy,]* (1497a; cf. C 863). Here emendation puts the suffixes in a medial dip where their stress is neutralized (section 8.5).
31. #*By þat any [lufly] dayly3t* (1137a; cf. C 1486); #*For he my3t not [siker] be slayn* (1854a; cf. 1637b); #*And [syn] of absolucioun* (1882a; cf. 1797a); #*Pat I schal swere [gladly,] bi God* (2122a; cf. 1245a). In 1137a, alliteration falls on the second constituent of *dayly3t*, as in 1180a.

Chapter 8 Survival and Extinction in Types A2, Da, and E

1. Middle English type Da is introduced in section 8.12. The extinction of type E is discussed in section 8.6.
2. Terasawa, *Nominal Compounds*, surveys previous research and provides new criteria for distinguishing Old English compounds from phrases.
3. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 103.
4. Campbell, *Grammar*, pp. 34–35.

5. Beo 215a, 232a, 1246a, 1267a, 1562a, 1650a, 1925a, 2086a, 2109a, 2154a, 2339a, and 2618a.
6. G 273a, 308a, 380a, 406a, 423a, 449a, 475a, 598a, 606a, 674a, 755a, 829a, 868a, 883a, 915a, 939a, 976a, 1026a, 1049a, 1131a, 1191a, 1193a, 1341a, 1364a, 1511a, 1629a, 1710a, 1735a, 1794a, 1880a, 1907a, 1923a, 1937a, 2112a, 2190a, 2409a, and 2444a.
7. Cf. 97a, 191a, 543a, 1032a, 1268a, 1334a, 1433a, 1489a, 1546a, 1691a, 1751a, 1979a, 2253a, 2334a, 2432a, and 2441a.
8. Cf. 1784b, 1934b, and 2466b.
9. Campbell, *Grammar*, pp. 216–18. With their fixed initial stress, anglicized forms satisfied universal requirements for alliterative poetry (section 2.6).
10. Verses 476a, 559a, 811a, 876a, 921a, 989a, 1010a, 1037a, 1208a, 1241a, 1248a, 1383a, 1498a, 1535a, 1872a, 2014a, 2031a, 2118a, 2126a, 2189a, 2205a, 2250a, and 2429a.
11. Verses 343b, 381b, 390b, 405b, 1213b, 1226b, 1376b, 1683b, 2073b, 2149b, 2260b, 2396b, and 2479b.
12. See section 3.5, item (19). Romance prefixes were perceived as equivalent to native prefixes in other respects as well (Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change*, pp. 56–57).
13. Borrowed words appearing more than once at the end of type A2 include *chemné* (875a and 978a), *comfort* (1221a and 1254a), (*h*)*ostel* (253a and 805a), *porter* (813a and 2072a), *prowes* (912a and 1249a), and *renoun* (313a, 2434a, and 2458a). Similar verses ending with *chapel* scan most plausibly as type A1 (63a, 1674a, 1857a, 1876a, 2399a, and 2496a). Unique instances with the value Ss include *blasoun* (828a), *blauncher* (1931a), *bonchef* (1764a), *brawen* (1611a), *castel* (1366a), *chaplayn* (2107a), *chaunsel* (946a), *closet* (934a), *colour* (944a), *cortays* (539a), *cortyn* (1476a), *counseyl* (347a), *drury* (1517a), *dublet* (571a), *fyler* (2225a), *harnays* (2016a), *joyfnes* (86a), *lewte* (2381a), *meruayl* (479a), *meschef* (1774a), *morsel* (1690a), *palays* (769a), *persoun* (913a), *prysoun* (1219a), *remnaunt* (2401a), *resoun* (1344a), *rouncé* (303a), *seruant* (1971a), *sesoun* (2085a), *statut* (1060a), *surfet* (2433a), *tapit* (568a), *trauayl* (2241a), *tressour* (1739a), and *walour* (1518a).
14. If the first foot scanned as Sx in these verses, resolution would be obligatory in the second foot and the result would be *Sx/S, a pattern unacceptable in *Beowulf*.
15. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 167.
16. On the Rhythm Rule in ordinary language and iambic pentameter, see Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” 218–23.
17. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 101–15. Words with intermediate phrasal stress sometimes alliterate in a Middle English dip but this option was not available to Old English poets. In *Beowulf*, for example, a high-frequency finite verb must occupy a lift if it alliterates and a dip if it stands before the first alliteration. Neutralization in medial dips was restricted in Old English poetry but became more common after types E and A2a were eliminated (sections 5.8–9).

18. Cf. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 123.
19. Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, p. 716.
20. Cf. 382a, 989a, 1219a, 1342a, 1743a, 2014a, 2072a, and 2253a.
21. Verses 811a, 1241a, 1498a, 2126a, 2189a, 2205a, and 2250a. These verses all alliterate on Gawain's name but no two repeat the same semantically inessential words. For similar variety in Old English formulaic composition, see Russom, "Aesthetic criteria."
22. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 75–79.
23. Cf. 131a, 214a, 853a, and 1482a.
24. Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 172–77.
25. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 52–54.
26. Cf. 797a, #*With coruon[e] coprounes*; and 949a, #*And he3ly[che] honowred*.
27. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 116–19.
28. Alternative word orders yield more acceptable patterns for the following apparent examples: 725a, #*He had(e) [dout{ele}s] ben ded*, type B; 1311a, #*[Forth] bo3ez, quen he watz boun*, type B; and 1328a, #*At þe asay [hem serched]*, type A1. With insertion of semantically inessential words: 122a, #*Foyoun of þe fresch(e) [flesch]*, type A2; 1197a, #*[ofer] me[n]e_o(þe)r amount*, type B; and 1959a, #*Burnez [busk] to hor bed(de)*, type Db (cf. 2284a, C 834a). For the remaining apparent examples, see [section 9.8](#). I will not attempt here to assess the relevance of apparent examples in other alliterative poems, which might represent slightly different metrical dialects, as with Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope in iambic pentameter tradition (Kiparsky, "Rhythmic structure," 212–18).
29. Cf. 1165a and 1901a. Verse 459a may look like another instance of triple alliteration, but Putter and Stokes place the third alliterating word in the b-verse to achieve normal scansion for the whole line.
30. Cf. *bot neked now wontez* (1062b), where alliterating *now* is required for the long dip.
31. Introduced in section 3.6, item (24).
32. Russom, "Constraints on resolution," 154–56.
33. Cf. 473b, 1885b, and 2412b.
34. Cf. 1114a, 1115a, 1144a, 1229a, 1527a, 1954a, and 2515a.
35. Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 226.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–211.
37. Old English verse patterns must be created from two native word patterns. A verse with an initial [s position](#) could not satisfy this requirement because there are no Old English word-stress patterns like sS, sxS, or sxxS.
38. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 101–05.

Chapter 9 Type Db and the Hypermetrical A-Verse

1. The Middle English hypermetrical a-verse is introduced in [section 9.9](#).
2. With (2a–b) cf. 121a, 289a, 480a, 505a, 517a, 530a, 547a, 570a, 576a, 909a, 933a, 1306a, 1325a, 1459a, 1540a, 1581a, 1583a, 1610a, 1634a, 1649a, 1701a, 2325a, 2466a, 2514a, and 2523a.
3. This unique example would scan as type Da rather than type Db if the medial French suffix was more prominent than the native suffix *-ly*. Verse 2457a looks like a relevant instance in type Db, but *surquidré* (from Old French *surcuiderie*) is more regularly spelled as *sorquydrye*, which should probably be interpreted as SxSx in verse-final position. On that interpretation, 2457a scans as xxxSxSxSx, a hypermetrical a-verse.
4. Cf. 698a, 932a, 2108a, and 2123a. Item (4c) is an instance with triple alliteration.
5. Type Db has so many lifts and dips that a long dip may not be required to distinguish this type as longer and heavier than a b-verse. Apparent examples lacking a long dip are 98a, 113a, 212a, 520a, 560a, 1013a, 2005a, and 2262a.
6. Cf. 328a, 1702a, 1903a, and 2331a.
7. Cf. 260a, 435a, 1097a, 1336a, 2316a, and 2516a. Verse 1545a is an additional instance with triple alliteration.
8. Cf. 4a, 12a, 29a, 100a, 251a, 263a, 653a, 877a, 1196a, 1243a, 1408a, 1483a, 1539a, 1678a, 1773a, 1952a, 2026a, 2206a, 2242a, 2275a, 2374a, 2380a, 2457a, 2473a, and 2508a.
9. Like (21d) are 115b, 845b, 1641b, and 2100b. Verse 732b is an additional instance with double alliteration. Like (21e) are 95b and 608b.
10. See item (6) in section 5.3 for examples.
11. Like type Db, the hypermetrical a-verse has many contrasting features and a long dip, though clearly desirable, might not be required. Apparent examples without a long dip are 370a, 1195a, 1651a, 1830a, 1952a, 2001a, 2182a, and 2316a. In type Db and the hypermetrical a-verse, variants without a long dip seem significantly more resistant to emendation than in types A2 and Da.
12. Russom, “*Pearl*-group cruxes.”
13. Cf. 26a, 330a, and 773a. In 330a and 773a, *hatz* alliterates on a lift as a main verb.
14. The Modern English translation for (27a) comes from Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, p. 266.
15. Wirral is a typical English wilderness of “holt and heath,” as G 1320 makes clear. The *hyze heþ(e)* in C 535a is represented as the typical refuge of the stag. Compare the *hyze* where the deer hunted by Bertilak seek refuge (G 1152a).
16. Tolkien and Gordon (eds.), *Gawain*, p. 89.

17. Although the number of such manuscript lines is significant, several kinds of evidence show that they would not have been acceptable to competent poets. See Putter et al., *Studies*, pp. 119–43.
18. It is also relevant that the word *mon* appears in many anomalous verses as an obvious trivialization of poetic language (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 126).
19. Jakobson, “Vowel alliteration.”
20. With no alliteration in the b-verse: 939b, 987b, 1081b, 1862b, 1962b, and 2446b. With no line-final trochee: 2055b. Without a required long dip: 13b. Absence of a long dip may not require emendation in Db verses and hypermetrical a-verses (sections 9.4 and 9.11).

Chapter 10 The Birth of English Iambic Meter

1. T. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*, p. 125.
2. Loss of optional syllabic value for final *-e* can be explained in terms of a common phonological change, reanalysis of a [postlexical](#) (phrase-level) rule as a lexical (word-level) rule. Cf. Kiparsky, “Dvandvas” and “Stratal OT.”
3. McJinsey, *Irregular -E*, pp. 22–25.
4. F. N. Robinson (ed.), *Works of Chaucer*, p. xxx.
5. This is an example of a meter in which a foot pattern is abstracted from a borrowed word pattern with significant frequency. Such meters are consistent with poetic universal P2 ([section 1.18](#)). The predominant native word pattern of early Modern English was a monosyllable with no inherent word rhythm, which could not provide a basis for the word foot in a meter with a single foot pattern. Monosyllabic tonal feet of the Chinese type ([section 1.18](#)) were of course not available in English.
6. “Parson’s Prologue,” lines 42–43. Chaucer is cited from Benson (ed.), *Riverside Chaucer*.
7. *General Prologue*, lines 124–26. On Chaucer’s attitudes toward Northern forms, see F. N. Robinson (ed.), *Works of Chaucer*, p. 654.
8. Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, p. 164. In Old English meter, unstressed syllables of stressed words must occupy metrical positions ([section 3.1](#), [norm N7](#)). Since iambic word-foot meters have a fixed, predictable line pattern, unstressed syllables of stressed words may stand outside an iambic foot as extrametrical.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
10. Iambic meter differs from Middle English alliterative meter in assigning primary importance to word stress rather than phrasal stress (Putter et al., *Studies*, p. 149). This is expected if iambic words are the linguistic prototypes for iambic feet.
11. Cf. 231, 386, 808, 810, 927, 1125, 1149, 1174, 1471, 1472, 1475, 1504, 1506, 1843, 1845, 1891, 2045, 2187, 2210, 2452, and 2454. The final word of line 2454 is

- spelled *hawtesse* but rhymes with *goddess*, so spelled, in 2452. For concreteness I base counts on the spellings in Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*. A few of these spellings have a final < e > that would seldom be realized in an alliterative line, but as we shall see this distinction is largely irrelevant in rhymed lines, which routinely ignore weak -e.
12. Solopova, “Alliteration and prosody,” 35 note 16. There is never a risk of monotony, of course, when feet have mismatched stresses.
 13. As in Old English meter (section 3.1), higher-level norms exert more influence than lower-level norms. Though clearly desirable in the wheel, realization of the foot as a word is less strictly regulated than realization of the trimeter line as a phrase or small sentence.
 14. Initially with trochaic value: 387, 416, 993, 1103, 1370, 1686, 2235, and 2280. Iambic: 339, and 2475. Medially with trochaic value: 463 and 666. Iambic: 365, 534, and 1975. Finally, always iambic: 487, 838, 1044, 1619, 1948, and 2156.
 15. Russom, *Old English Meter*, pp. 13 and 35.
 16. Cf. 17, 81, 106, 126, 230, 275, 297, 340, 514, 535, 586, 687, 710, 759, 760, 839, 898, 1207, 1350, 1352, 1401, 1577, 1600, 1715, 1842, 1918, 1920, 2044, 2088, 2090, 2117, 2283, 2307, 2308, 2354, 2405, and 2527.
 17. Cf. 341, 1843, and 2385. Since a single unstressed syllable is strongly preferred in the first dip, anglicized scansion with initial stress is indicated for *pénaunce* in 897 and for *sólace* in 1318.
 18. Verse-initial xSx words ending with a consonant appear in 1262 and 1419 as well as in item (5b). In medial position: 127, 362, 386, 535, 636, 992, 1044, and item (5c). In final position: 1017, 1813, 2426, 2428, 2429 and item (5a).
 19. Like (9a): 586, 687, and 1043. Compare the emendation of line 736 by Putter and Stokes. Like (9b): 532, 1177, 1316, and 2357.
 20. Ten Brink, *Language and Metre*, pp. 149–50. Even if not pronounced, an underlying final -e might have influenced rhyme by altering the character of the preceding consonant, for example by preventing devoicing of voiced stops that were word-final in *postlexical forms* but not in *lexical forms*.
 21. Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, p. 166.
 22. Cf. 107b, 1038b, and 1963b.
 23. Cf. 1037a, 1392b, and 2126a. For the initial stress, cf. the *lexicalized* phrase *grámercy*.
 24. Thus probably *Weldes nón so hy3(e) hawtesse* (2454) and *Whiderwárde-so-euer he wolde* (2478). If *whider-* had the stronger stress, 2478 would have an unusually long medial dip.
 25. For analysis of this complex realization see Kiparsky, “Rhythmic structure,” 208.

26. Cf. 175, 414, 487, 587, 1042, 1045, 1124, 1556, 1578, 1619, 1995, 2088, 2158, 2327, and 2476.
27. Cf. 129, 299, 413, 1368, 1769, 2136, and 2280. In some cases the stressed word in the dip before S₃ was probably subordinated at phrase level by the Rhythm Rule.
28. Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, p. 166.
29. Cf. lines 83, 761, 1452, and 2255.
30. Putter and Stokes (eds.), *Gawain Poet*, pp. 7–8.

Chapter 11 General Summary

1. Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, p. 142.
2. Kiparsky, "Rhythmic structure," 212–18.
3. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 188.

Glossary of specialized terms as used in this book

Most of these terms are used with high frequency for routine analysis of poetic verses and lines. Page numbers are provided only for passages in which the meaning of the term is specially discussed. Technical terms used within the definitions have their own glossary entries. See the index for terms not listed in the glossary.

- acoustic signal** 5, 10, 14 The manifestation of an utterance in sound waves.
- additive effect** 17, 57, 80 An effect with multiple causes that is greater than the effect of any one cause.
- adposition** 48, 51, 163, 180 A general term for prepositions and postpositions.
- alliteration** 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 14, 32, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 51, 53, 55, 56, 58, 66, 67, 71, 83, 87, 91, 123, 126, 129, 131, 140, 147, 149, 153, 155, 156, 159, 169, 171, 174, 178, 179, 181, 183, 184, 186, 189, 195, 199, 200, 202, 204, 211, 212, 220, 222, 228, 229, 231, 232, 235, 242, 243, 245, 246, 250, 252, 255, 257, 260, 265, 271, 274, 275, 276 Matching within the onset of a stressed syllable.
- anacrusis** 63, 64, 69, 74, 82, 83, 88, 92, 94, 118, 129, 130, 132, 134, 149, 152, 157, 163, 176, 178, 184, 188, 224, 274 One or two unstressed syllables placed before the first alliterating syllable of an Old English type A or D verse.
- ādahlending*** 4 Rhyme on the stressed syllable of a word that need not extend to following unstressed syllables. In *skothending*, the stressed vowels must match in length but are not otherwise restricted.
- a-verse** 45, 52 The opening verse in the two-verse alliterative line.
- beat** 231, 287 In poetry, a syllable with metrically significant stress. With reference to musical dissonance, the effect created by notes close together.
- Behaghel's law** A tendency to place light linguistic constituents before heavy ones.
- bracketing mismatch** 24, 26, 28, 55 Failure of linguistic boundaries to align with metrical boundaries.
- b-verse** 45, 52 The closing verse in the two-verse alliterative line.
- cadence** 18 In Western music, a progression from a dissonant chord to a restful chord that closes a musical unit.
- caesura** 30, 31, 222 The word boundary that divides a verse or line into two metrical constituents.
- categorical rule** 55, 171 A rule that does not allow exceptions.
- closed class** 71 A word class strongly resistant to addition of new members. The classes of pronouns, articles, conjunctions, auxiliaries, and prepositions are closed. Cf. *function word*.

- coda** 10 The part of a syllable containing any consonants after the vowel.
- copula** 49 The verb *to be* in constructions like *Mary is a doctor* and *The crackers were stale*.
- dactyl** 54, 65, 73, 86, 230 In English meters, an Sxx metrical foot normally realized as a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.
- demarcative stress** 45 In West Indo-European languages, a fixed word-initial stress that facilitates parsing of a sentence into words.
- determiner** 7, 49 A function word that singles out one or more particular members of a category. *This*, *those*, *the*, and *their* are determiners.
- dip** 63, 66, 77, 80, 83, 112, 127, 128, 129, 131, 132, 135, 136, 138, 140, 144, 147, 150, 152, 153, 174, 176, 177, 184, 201, 225, 232, 235 A metrical domain normally occupied by one or more unstressed syllables.
- dispreferred** 166, 227, 264 Permissible but to be avoided if possible.
- elision** 135, 147, 148, 152, 269 In English alliterative meters, assignment of adjacent unstressed vowels to one metrical position.
- enclitic** 163, 193, 209 A function word that has become part of a preceding stressed word.
- enjambment** 15, 18, 19, 33 A mismatch between the end of a phrase and the end of a poetic line.
- extrametrical syllable** 55, 56, 59, 63, 64, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 76, 78, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 92, 94, 97, 102, 106, 116, 118, 132, 134, 135, 138, 150, 184, 190, 223, 261 An unstressed syllable that stands outside metrical feet and is governed by special rules. In Old English poetry, only unstressed words and unstressed prefixes can be extrametrical. Unstressed syllables of stressed words must be included in a metrical foot and are subject to the usual rules for verse types. Extrametrical syllables also occur in English iambic meters. In Middle English alliterative poetry, which does not employ word feet, optional unstressed syllables are subject to the rules for verse types.
- falsifiable** Formulated with sufficient precision to be tested by empirical evidence.
- foregrounding** 15, 29 Highlighting elements of special interest, as with rhyme or alliteration.
- formula** 36, 40, 160, 171, 174, 257 A traditional phrase used to satisfy important metrical requirements.
- function word** 7, 26, 44, 55, 56, 58, 59, 62, 67, 70, 73, 77, 80, 81, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 97, 102, 104, 106, 116, 118, 130, 132, 135, 137, 141, 149, 150, 162, 176, 188, 223, 231, 233, 255, 256, 260, 267, 270, 275 A word of high frequency and low prominence with primarily grammatical function.
- government** 47 A close syntactic relation between a verb or function word and another word in the same phrase. Verbs and prepositions both govern objects and assign special forms to object pronouns, for example.
- half-line** 38 In English alliterative meters, an a-verse or a b-verse.
- haplogy** 172, 240 Omission of language in proximity to similar language.
- head** 47 The word within a phrase that determines its syntactic function.
- headless** 261, 262, 268 Lacking the unstressed syllable that normally begins an iambic line.

heavy syllable See *syllable length*, *syllable weight*.

iamb 25, 260, 262 In English verse, an xS metrical foot normally realized as an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

idiomatic 16, 18, 144, 257, 271 Used routinely in ordinary speech.

infix 75 Like a prefix or suffix but internal to the word.

internalization 12, 20, 88, 223, 258, 276 Incorporation into a mental rule system that operates without conscious effort or attention.

introductory principle 17, 262, 271 Close adherence to metrical norms at the beginning of a metrical unit.

labeling mismatch See *stress mismatch*.

lax vowel 11 A vowel requiring relatively little effort of articulation. Cf. *tense vowel*.

lexical level 270, 288, 302 The level at which word-level linguistic rules apply. Cf. *postlexical level*.

lexical nouns and adjectives 7, 76, 158, 202 Prominent nouns and adjectives from open classes, as distinct from pronouns and demonstrative adjectives, for example.

lexical presupposition 159 A lowering of prominence in nouns that have been semantically bleached due to previous use in close proximity. Such nouns function like pronouns.

lexicalization 71, 302 Creation of a new simplex word, for example from a compound.

lift 63, 91 A strong metrical position normally occupied by a stressed syllable.

linking verb 48, 166 A verb that functions somewhat like the copula, as with *seems* in *The bread seems stale*.

major constituent break 11 The boundary between the largest sub-constituents of a syllable, word, phrase, or sentence.

metrical complexity 16, 17, 24, 56, 58, 62, 64, 65, 67, 68, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 81, 82, 88, 96, 98, 105, 112, 113, 130, 133, 156, 178, 255, 257, 271, 273 Departure from metrical norms.

metrical foot 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 43, 44, 45, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, 68, 69, 71, 76, 83, 87, 88, 91, 92, 106, 129, 130, 134, 198, 222, 225, 234, 259, 260, 262, 263, 266, 268, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275 A metrical unit corresponding to a word.

metrical line 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 41, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 61, 64, 67, 68, 87, 88, 89, 116, 125, 126, 129, 132, 135, 136, 137, 141, 149, 184, 198, 199, 207, 222, 235, 256, 257, 259, 260, 261, 263, 265, 268, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275 A metrical unit corresponding to a sentence, normally with five to nine words.

metrical position 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 39, 54, 56, 57, 61, 62, 65, 72, 135, 259, 268, 270 A metrical unit corresponding to a syllable. See *strong position*, *weak position*.

metrical subordination 51, 131 In English alliterative meters, reduction of metrical prominence by placement within a dip or by placement after metrically prominent syllables.

- metrical syllable** 50, 67, 75, 128, 136, 137, 152, 262, 273 Syllabic material that occupies one metrical position, as distinct from an extrametrical syllable or a syllable that shares a position (cf. *elision*, *resolution*).
- mismatch** 19, 20, 132, 140, 166, 222, 237, 260, 266 Failure to align a metrical constituent with the corresponding linguistic constituent.
- mora** 23 A unit of syllabic duration corresponding to a short vowel or to a consonant in the syllabic coda.
- nuclear stress** 46, 47, 275, 287 Prominent stress on the last stressed word in a Modern English phrase or sentence.
- nucleus** 10 The part of a syllable containing the vowel.
- onset** 9 The part of a syllable containing any consonants before the vowel.
- open class** 7 A word class of unlimited size allowing for routine addition of new members, as with main verbs, lexical nouns, and lexical adjectives.
- optimality** 21, 23, 55, 176, 198, 273, 283, 288 Adherence to important metrical or linguistic norms.
- ornamental features** 30 Sound echoes or matching rhythms not required by metrical rules.
- overlap** 60, 82, 135, 178, 185 Failure to distinguish one metrical domain from another, as when a foot is indistinguishable from a verse or an a-verse is indistinguishable from a b-verse.
- parallelistic meter** 29 A meter employing lines with matching syntactic structures.
- phoneme** 3, 19, 32, 36 A vowel or consonant apprehended as distinct from all others in a particular language.
- phonetic representation** 3, 9 A representation of an utterance as pronounced. Cf. *underlying form*.
- phrasal stress** 31, 45, 51, 68, 91, 131, 134, 140, 156, 159, 223, 230, 260, 275 Stress relative to other words in a phrase, clause, or sentence.
- postlexical level** 289, 302 The level at which phrase-level linguistic rules apply.
- postposition** 47, 52, 164, 181, 202, 240 Like a preposition but placed after the word it governs.
- prediction** 89, 133, 274 In a scientific theory, an implicit claim that a certain cause has a certain effect.
- principle of asymmetry** 128, 135, 184, 256, 257 In English alliterative meters, a metrical constraint promoting contrast between the a-verse and the b-verse. Cf. *overlap*.
- principle of closure** 17, 18, 20, 28, 39, 56, 89, 98, 101, 127, 128, 129, 136, 151, 178, 198, 207, 263, 270, 271, 275, 276 A tendency toward stricter adherence to metrical norms toward the end of a metrical unit such as a half-line, line, stanza, or whole poem.
- principle of reduction** 137, 248 A tendency to omit elements of underlying form in words with low linguistic or metrical prominence.
- prominence** 71, 91, 126, 137, 140, 141, 148, 158, 167, 168, 197, 211, 214, 223, 237, 266, 268, 274, 275 In linguistics, an emphasis created by features such as stress, pitch, or syllable length; in metrics, an emphasis created by a sound echo or by placement in a strong metrical position.

- proposition** 23, 29, 274 A complete statement of the kind expressed by a declarative sentence.
- prosodic variants** 21, 137 Distinct lexical and postlexical forms of a given word used to satisfy distinct metrical requirements.
- psychologically real** 12, 30 Consistent with what we know about human mental processes.
- pyrrhic foot** 25 An iambic or trochaic foot with a non-prominent syllable on its strong position.
- quantitative meter** 39 A meter that regulates syllable length rather than stress.
- realization** 17, 31, 55, 59, 92, 104, 110, 132, 137, 143, 150, 283, 285 A matching of linguistic material to a metrical pattern.
- reanalysis** 131, 200 Evolution of new metrical or linguistic rules in response to language change.
- reduplication** Grammatical repetition. In Proto-Germanic grammar, matching onset consonants of root syllables in perfect-tense prefixes.
- regulated word-foot meter** 41, 44, 53 An Irish meter with a fixed number of words per line that repeats stress patterns in runs of two or more lines.
- rehearsal memory** 20 A memory function specialized for sentences and poetic lines with five to nine words.
- resolution** 50, 57, 132 In Old English meter, sharing of a metrical position by a short stressed syllable and a following unstressed syllable.
- rhyme** 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 127, 137, 144, 260, 268, 271, 275 In linguistics, a constituent of the syllable that includes the nucleus and the coda. In canonical English meters, matching of a stressed vowel and of any other phonemes between the stressed vowel and the end of the word.
- root** 3, 7, 10, 14, 45, 61, 69, 70, 137, 140, 212 The part of a word that bears its distinctive meaning, as distinct from prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings.
- run** 42 In Irish alliterative meters, a sequence of verses with the same foot patterns in the same order.
- sandhi** 9, 21 Phrase-level alteration of a phoneme due to the influence of an adjacent word.
- semantic bleaching** 158, 246 Reduction of prominence in a normally prominent word due to high frequency in a particular discourse.
- simplexes** 19, 71, 259 Words with a single root and no other elements except for grammatical endings, as distinct from compounds, words with prefixes, and words with derivational suffixes.
- skothening* 4 See *adálhending*.
- sound echo** 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 30, 45, 71, 141, 260, 265, 275 A repetition of linguistic sounds that foregrounds relations between words, as with rhyme or alliteration.
- stress mismatch** 27, 28, 55 Failure to align linguistic stress with metrical prominence.
- s(trong) position** 23, 25, 30, 39, 51, 55, 56, 57, 61, 63, 71, 83, 91, 140, 144, 146, 200, 211, 214, 222, 232, 266, 267, 274, 293, 299 The S position represents a primary lift normally occupied by a syllable with primary word stress. The s position

represents a secondary lift normally occupied by a syllable with secondary word stress.

syllabic meter 30 In Indo-European traditions, a meter that regulates caesura placement and the number of metrical syllables but does not regulate stress or vowel length.

syllable length 22 A long syllable has a long vowel or a short vowel followed by a consonant in the coda. A short syllable has a short vowel followed by an empty coda.

syllable weight 22 Long stressed syllables are heavy; short stressed syllables are light.

syntactic break 16, 19, 46, 83, 87, 130, 222, 240, 255 The syntactic boundary between the major sub-constituents of a phrase, clause, or sentence.

syntactically complete 16 Containing everything required for a complete sentence.

tense vowel 11, 12, 13, 38, 259 A vowel that requires a special effort of articulation. Tenseness is strongly associated with stress and syllable length. Cf. *lax vowel*.

trivialization 169, 171, 187, 240 Scribal substitution of ordinary language for poetic language, usually with adverse metrical consequences.

trochaic inversion 26, 268, 269 Substitution of a trochee for an iamb at the beginning of a line or of a phrase within the line.

trochee In English meters, an Sx metrical foot normally realized as a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.

ultralong dip 63, 66, 77, 80, 83, 112, 127, 128, 129, 131, 132, 135, 136, 138, 140, 142, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 150, 152, 153, 174, 176, 177, 184, 201, 232, 235, 242 In Middle English alliterative lines, a sequence of four or more unstressed metrical syllables.

underlying form 9, 137, 140, 141, 147, 248, 270 A representation of an utterance as apprehended by native speakers that may include sounds not pronounced during normal language use.

universalist 1, 2, 5, 20, 28, 30, 31, 53, 277 A metrical or linguistic theory employing universals.

universals 1, 2, 20, 39, 47, 55, 89, 127, 131, 149, 262, 270 Principles that apply in all human linguistic or metrical systems.

variant 45, 58, 62, 90, 130, 135, 149, 150, 256, 257, 262, 268, 276 In English alliterative meters, an arrangement of linguistic constituents that realizes a verse type, as distinct from other arrangements realizing the same type. Variants include optimal realizations.

weak position 23, 25, 30, 39, 55, 137, 139, 144, 146 In English meters, an x position normally occupied by an unstressed syllable.

word foot See *metrical foot*.

word stress 25, 31, 45, 55, 57, 62, 68, 69, 91, 134, 260, 275 Stress in the underlying form of a word, which can be subordinated at phrase level. Cf. *phrasal stress*.

zero alliteration 10 Alliterative matching of empty onsets in stressed syllables, as with *egg* and *oval*.

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